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ABSTRACT

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The Effects of Peer Discussion on Intermediate Students' Level of Comprehension in Written Response

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Bellingham, Washington
June, 2000

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of literature circle discussions on students' written responses. Two main research questions guided data collection and analysis: (1) How does literature circle discussion around one book affect the students' written responses according to a comprehension taxonomy?, and (2) Do literature circle discussions increase and expand students' level of understanding to elicit a more interpretative, analytical, evaluative and/or appreciative written response? Data was collected through student pre-surveys, teacher anecdotal records and evaluation of written response forms. Written responses were analyzed according to an adaptation of several taxonomies. This study provided evidence that literature discussion circles can help increase the complexity of students' level of comprehension in their written response. Although limited to five students focusing on one book, this study provides insights into the usefulness and practice of literature circles and written response in an elementary classroom.

Literature circles are formed when people gather to talk about books that they have read or would like to read. These groups can form at a dining room table, a cozy couch on a rainy day, a local coffeehouse, a school classroom or the downtown library. The setting does not matter. Important, however, is the broader social, interpretive, analytical, and appreciative context in which a literary response is viewed. Literature discussion circles have become a popular way of teaching elementary children how to evaluate literary components of a text (Daniels,1994; Hill, Johnson & Noe, 1995). According to Owens (1995), literature circles promote a love for literature and positive attitudes toward reading, they reflect a constructivist, child-centered model of literacy, encourage extensive and intensive reading and invite natural discussion that lead to student inquiry and critical thinking. Literature circles "support diverse responses to texts, foster interaction and collaboration, provide choice and encourage responsibility, expose children to literature from multiple perspectives and finally they nurture reflection and self-evaluation" (Owens, p.3). Literature circles also provide numerous responses according to either efferent or aesthetic stances taken. Rosenblatt's, Transactional Theory of Reader Response, (as cited in Hancock, 2000) describes efferent reading as acquiring information during interaction with the text and aesthetic reading as lived through experiences with the text.

Many studies have been conducted on literature circles and their contributions to the classroom. Researchers have studied students' written responses after reading a certain text or the literature circle's effects on reading comprehension (Many, 1991; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Hancock, 2000; Sebesta, Monson & Senn, 1995). Other resources illustrate how to conduct literature circles and how to evaluate the students'

written response (Daniels, 1994; Hill, Johnson, Noe, 1995). Studies are limited that focus specifically on how the discussion takes place in literature circles and the effects of the discussion on students' level of comprehension in the written responses.

Statement of the Problem

This study investigates the effects of literature discussion circles on students' written responses. The written responses are evaluated for evidence of peer influence from the discussion, how the student incorporates that influence in his/her writing and the achieved level of comprehension. Literature circles are an integral component to the reading and writing curriculum, however, we need to evaluate how literature circles affect the level of comprehension in students' written responses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose for this study is to examine how literature discussion circles can enrich students' written responses. Another focus of this study is to see how students increase their comprehension by using what they discussed to enhance their written response.

Teachers need to find an accurate way of measuring students' comprehension in literature circles. Sebesta, et al. (1995) states, "The implication is that teachers should promote a balance [of efferent and aesthetic responses] by encouraging students to relive, predict, evaluate, connect, and link text with their own lives. Furthermore, we need an instrument to tell us how students respond and how teachers direct response" (p.445). In this study I developed and applied a taxonomy that evaluates the levels of comprehension in written responses that were based on the work of Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, &

Krathwohl, 1956; Vandergrift, 1990; Sebesta, et al. 1995; and Smith, J.R., & Barrett, T.C., 1979 (Appendix G).

Grand Tour Question

Working with literature circles prompted me to ask these important questions on the students' comprehension and how I can measure their levels of comprehension. How does a literature circle discussion around a book affect the students' written responses according to my comprehension taxonomy? Do literature circle discussions increase and expand student's level of understanding to elicit a more interpretive, analytical, evaluative and/or appreciative written response?

Sub-questions

- Can a useful taxonomy be developed and applied that begins to look at levels of comprehension in students' written responses?
- What techniques and support can be used to enhance students' discussion?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used extensively in the professional literature about literature circles.

- Author's Craft- The reader is gathering information on the literary elements of the text by evaluating the author's use of language, creation of mood, use of literary devices, how the author infers a character's motives, feelings or traits and the different types of openings and leads the author brings into the text (Daniels, 1994; Hill et al., 1995).

- Cognition- Intellectual operations, skills such as decision making or problem solving. "The process or result of recognizing, interpreting, judging, and reasoning" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p34).
- Comprehension- Readers are able to identify the key components in the text including the theme, genre, literary or historical context, setting, plot, point of view, language and characters (Vandergrift 1990; Bloom et al., 1956; and Sebesta et al., 1995).
- Degrees of Reading Power (DRP)- A reading test that is given to students at the beginning and end of the year in the districts in which I conducted this study. Students are given non-fiction text passages with missing words, and they are to select the best word choice to go in the missing word blank. This test is used to show the level of comprehension that students have of non-fiction text. In this study, the DRP scores provided a description of students' involvement (Touchstone Applied Science Associates, 1995, p.3).
- Literature Circles- "Discussion groups in which children meet regularly to talk about books. Groups can be determined by book choices" (Hill et al., 1995, p.2).
- Reading Response Log- Student's spiral notebook containing responses from questions given from "Focus on Your Feelings" (Hill et al., 1995, p.20, Sloan, 1984 and Vandergrift, 1990).
- Response- Literary reactions to the text, including written, oral, artistic or dramatic (Hill et al., 1995).

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study was the population selection. The fourth/fifth grade students who participated were from a middle to higher socioeconomic level. I worked with six students from the class based on their book choice, which was Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh (O'Brien, 1986). I was only able to choose one book due to time constraints and availability of students. Students chose either a series of prompts, "Focus on your Feelings" (Hill et al., 1995), or a hybrid of Sloan (1984) and Vandergrift's (1990) open-ended questions to answer in their reading response logs (Finke & Edwards, 1997). The data collection in this study was varied. The taxonomy that I used to evaluate students' written responses stemmed from a combination of sources, Bloom et al., (1956), Hancock (2000), Smith & Barrett (1979), Vandergrift (1995) and Sebesta et al. (1995).

The setting for the discussion circles was not always in the same room. This inconsistency could have had a direct effect on the discussion and on the written responses. One student was absent for three out of eight sessions. I decided to delete his responses from the study due to his inconsistent attendance.

Limitations

This study may have a variety of limitations. Since teachers have their own students, each with varying reading or comprehension levels, my findings may not be generalizable to all fourth/fifth grade classrooms. Some students may not be at the proper reading level for the text that they chose. Other confounding variables, such as any emotional attachment to the text chosen will affect the internal validity. Some students have an aversion to any fantasy or science fiction genres due to personal or

religious reasons. While in discussion circles, students might have a past (either positive or negative) relationship with their peers that might affect their discussion. Students might have had previous experience with a text or an author that could affect the outcomes of their responses.

Rationale for the Study

Literature circles bring meaning to children's lives. According to Peterson & Eeds (1990), "We believe that genuine meaning, meaning over which readers have ownership, arises only if those readers are able to structure it themselves, through their own interpretations, in the light of their experiences and their intent" (p.16).

This study investigates the overall effectiveness of literature circles and the benefits of using them in the classroom on a regular basis. More specifically, this study examines the development of intellectual and deeper comprehension in students' written responses. This study will help me to identify how to engage students with literature and analyze how their written responses change over time. Literature circles can allow the students to interact with their peers on an intellectual level and deepen their responses.

Review of Literature

In this review, I will focus on five areas that provide support for the necessary components for successful literature circles. Those areas are 1) the components of successful literature circles, 2) the value of discussing literature, 3) teacher and students' roles in promoting discussion, 4) how writing supports discussion and comprehension and 5) how the Washington state essential Academic learning requirements indirectly support the use of literature circles. This information provides valuable insight into the structuring of literature circles and content of mini-lessons.

The Components of Successful Literature Circles

An essential tool for teachers starting literature circles or re-evaluating the ones already established is Hill, Johnson & Noe's (1995) Literature Circles and Response. A collection of authors, teachers and researchers compiled this book. They defined literature circles and gave suggestions on how to incorporate them in the primary and intermediate grades. The book includes information about literature circles and teaching reading and the tools used for assessment and evaluation.

Hill, et al. (1995), believe that students need to have a choice in evaluating and reflecting their own responses. One group of students created their own definition for reflective and/or thinking "the act of studying, pondering and thinking carefully" (p.108). A thoughtful response is to "communicate one's ideas in a clear, detailed manner through conversation, writing or an aesthetic response" (p.108). The emphasis on supporting each other's learning is an important aspect for students to remember while participating in a literature circle. Guidelines are provided to help the teacher support the students' discussion and their process of deriving meaningful insight from the discussion.

The need for a variety of assessment tools is emphasized. Many forms of assessments from different teachers are provided to aid in creating assessment rubrics. Although there are many forms offered, the authors caution against using too many forms. This can become confusing to the students and take away the community learning aspect of the literature circle exploration. Anecdotal note-taking strategies are suggested and detailed for teacher's use in administering, coding and analyzing their students' discussions.

Daniels (1994) provides a variety of resources on materials such as post-it notes and role sheets for the students, how to schedule and manage groups, how to keep records, as well as how to evaluate and grade when implementing literature circles. This book provides practical applications in detail from beginning literature circles to the more advanced discussion groups. The author suggests that teachers continue to provide student choice, but keep the group numbers at a productive level such as four to six members of each group. Teachers need to balance the offering of choice of books with a certain consistent framework for the literature circles in mind. Teachers can begin literature circles with a set number of books that fall under the same genre, thus allowing the students to choose their books, but still maintaining a set framework so the teacher can utilize their curriculum.

The Value of Discussing Literature

The value of discussing literature has been analyzed through theory and practice. Lucy Calkins', The Art of Teaching Writing (1994), best explains her own implementation of peer discussion in her classroom when she says, "What I find is that young children's talk almost always moves their writing forward" (p. 116). Literature

circles provide a prompt for students' writing because it gives them the chance to reflect orally on their reactions to the story. By hearing other students' reflections they can gain a sense of new perspectives and incorporate other ideas to add to their writing. Calkins (1994) reiterates this point, "Often talk will not only lead to longer, more fleshed-out texts, but it will also help the lilting sound of oral language to appear on the page" (p.116). Discussing literature enables students to take various avenues of ideas in their writing that otherwise might not have been included.

Rosenblatt (1978) describes reading as an aesthetic experience where the reader brings the text to life with his/her prior experiences. The text is no longer a book of facts simply to be retold; it captures the reader's imagination as well. This "reader response" theory encompasses all interpretations of the text. Rosenblatt (1978) parallels reading a text with an art form, stimulating the reader's imagination and suspending reality while submerged in the text; she states, "The capacity of the human being to evoke images of things or events not present, and even never experienced, or which may never have existed, is undoubtedly an important element in art…yet this imagination capacity is not limited to art but is basic to any kind of verbal communication" (p. 32). Rosenblatt emphasizes the importance of using communication in understanding a text and giving readers an outlet to express their personal reactions to the text whether oral or written.

Leal (1992) focused on the nature of first, third and fifth grade children's talk as they discussed three types of text. The subjects were evaluated on their discussion and used four repeated measures of analysis of variance. The researcher found that there were significantly more comments made drawing from prior knowledge with peer-provided information while discussing the informational storybook than when discussing the other

genres. She found that children build on prior knowledge. Peer discussion aids in confirming, altering and expanding individual interpretations. In a sense, comprehension starts with students' personal reactions to the text and can build upon each other's reactions to a more interpretive, analytical and evaluative level.

Teacher and Student Roles in Promoting Discussion

There are many roles that teachers can play in the implementation of literature circles. Daniels (1994) suggests using role sheets for the students to provide a different task for each group member, but they are to be used on a temporary basis until students can incorporate all the roles themselves. Daniels (1994) cautions that "Since respecting students' ideas and inviting genuine conversation into the classroom is contrary to most kids' experiences of schooling, we have to highlight the shift in expectations that literature circles embody" (p.61). Tasks for participants in literature circles include bringing their book to the discussion, writing in their reading response logs, and marking passages from the text that the students found interesting or felt could illuminate the discussion.

Daniels (1994) provides insights on how students can use post-it notes, bookmarks, clipboards, role sheets and reading response logs to keep track of their ideas. A clipboard can be a place to keep notes on group member roles or key ideas and comments that students would like to share. Teachers can use post-it notes on students' written response logs asking questions to prompt the students to write more. The students can use post-it notes in their book to mark quotes or ideas that they would like to share with the group. Daniels provides teachers with a wide range of ideas to implement into the beginning stages of literature circles.

Samway (1991) studied the teacher's and student's roles and perspectives on literature circles for the classroom. This article focuses on the improvement in reading and enjoyment the students perceived when joining a literature discussion circle. The author discussed the profound cultural and emotional impact the books had on the students. Students were able to better articulate their views through discussion with their peers.

Samway (1991) found that the best way to implement literature circles is to allow students choices in the books that they read, giving them the opportunity to read whole books, not excerpted ones, and providing students sustained time to read on a regular basis. The teacher said her students read 20 minutes daily at the beginning of the school year. After she implemented literature study circles, they read daily for one hour. Being able to read for more than 20 minutes up to one hour is a great improvement and the researcher attributes this success to the literature circles.

The teacher asked the children their responses to becoming a reader. Did they picture themselves as readers at the beginning of the year? Most students had negative experiences with reading at the beginning of the year. Since the implementation of literature circles and a sustained period for reading, most students said they actually liked reading big novels. The teacher asked the students to describe what was different about the year where literature was used compared to the year they read from a textbook. The students said they liked the opportunity to choose the books they read, but wanted more choices on their assignments. The students discussed what limitations some of the assignments posed. The students wanted to have a variety of books to read and discuss. They were able to do this through literature circles.

The author suggests various roles that teachers and students may take to benefit the most from the literature circle. The teacher can take the part of an informed and engaged co-participant in the discussions. The students are to read their books, write in their literature response logs or work on an assignment for a follow-up session. After the discussion, the students are encouraged to reflect on their contribution and the group members' contributions as well. The whole class takes some time in the day to evaluate their contributions in the group in addition to their oral and written responses.

Finke and Edwards (1997) studied teacher education students who worked with elementary students in a literature study circle. The authors thought the experience of watching the younger students interacting in the circle might enhance the teacher education students' learning of how the circles work.

The article describes the literature circle activities, reports their analysis of the insights the students gained, and presented reflections to benefit other teacher educators committed to creating learning communities. The literature activities included writing a song to retell the story, rehearsing and performing the song for morning announcements on closed circuit TV and responding to literature by writing poetry. Finke and Edwards used Sloan's (1984) and Vandergrift's (1990) examples of open-ended questions such as, "What does the author do to create suspense, to make you want to read on to find out what happens?" (Sloan, 1984, p.368). These open-ended questions were used to better understand the elementary students' level of understanding and showed that

> The (elementary) students expressed metacognitive awareness, realizing the influence of the community upon their own reading/ thinking processes and

> recognizing that reading is a social act of constructing meaning (Finke & Edwards, 1997, p.376).

The authors emphasized how the student teachers benefited by learning about instructional strategies and collaboration in a learning community. They noted that collaboration is accomplished through listening, clarifying, and supporting for the benefit of all participants. Key conditions for the students identified in this study included being purposeful, communicative, just, disciplined, caring and celebrative. The authors feel convinced to continue their work in creating intergenerational learning communities in preservice reading/language arts education.

How Writing Supports Discussion and Comprehension

Communication and use of language, when discussing a text with peers, reflects the manner in which students will achieve an accurate portrayal of the response they had intended to give and not one that might be influenced by the teacher's language.

Both Calkins (1994) and Harste, Short & Burke (1988) emphasize the support that writing and discussion provide each other. Calkins (1994) speaks of peer conferencing centered on students' writing, "Children write, and if given the chance to share their pieces with a responsive listener, they often realize they have more to tell and someone who hopes they tell it" (p. 99). The significance of discussion on student's writing is supported by Harste et al. (1988), "As children watch each other and talk together about their work, they provide important demonstrations for one another…Group sharing times allow authors to share their creations and to discuss the problems they faced and the strategies they used to surmount them" (p. 16). Not only does writing support discussion, but comprehension as well. When students are given the opportunity to discuss their

writing their comprehension becomes clearer and they are able to write with that new-found clarity.

> Through an exchange of meanings in conversation we begin to explain things to ourselves to clarify our thinking. As we experience the perspectives of others, we extend and elaborate our current notions. In addition, social interaction serves as an important source of ideas and assistance with authoring problems (Harste et. al., p. 12).

The impact of discussion on writing is significant in that writing supports discussion and discussion supports writing. The two are essentially interchangeable.

How the Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements Indirectly Support the Use of Literature Circles

The Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRS), (Washington State Commission on Learning, 1998) provide curriculum expectations for teachers to incorporate into their classroom learning community. The EALRS provide a focus for assessment that emphasizes achievements in writing abilities appropriate for students at early grade levels. The purpose for the requirements is to supply classrooms with important curriculum components that lay the proper foundation for readers and writers to build upon. Some of the suggested writing purposes for students at the end of the fourth grade are: personal communication, shared learning, entertainment, information communication, self-expression and explanation. Listed below are requirements for students to master by the end of the fourth grade.

Essential Learning Requirements for Writing

1.2 - The student uses style appropriate to the audience and purpose

-Use voice, word choice, and sentence fluency for intended style and audience (p. 27).

-Communicates own perspective and ideas (p.29)

2.2 - The student writes for different purposes including:

-To respond to teacher's prompt

-To tell about something

-To name something

-To describe something

-To imagine

-To learn (p. 31)

3.3 – The student understands and uses the steps of the writing process (p.28)

-Students will learn to revise the writing process (p.28)

-Collect input form others (p. 32)

4 - The student analyzes and evaluates the effectiveness of written work (p.28)

4.1- To assess own strengths and needs for improvement (p. 34)

4.2- Seek and offer feedback (p.34)

Essential Learning Requirements for Communication

1. - The student uses listening and observation skills to gain understanding (p.39).

1.2- Listen and observe to gain and interpret understanding (p. 39).

1.3- Check for understanding by asking questions and paraphrasing (p.39)

-Ask questions to clarify content and meaning including who, what, when , where and how (p.41).

2.1 Communicate clearly to a range of audiences for different purposes

- Communicate to teacher, small group, and class (p.42).

3.- The student uses communication strategies and skills to work effectively with others (p.40).

Writing and communication requirements are partly met in the implementation of literature circles. Many of these requirements can be used under the implementation of literature circles.

Significance of the Study

This review emphasizes the value of how responding to literature through writing and discussion can increase students' level of comprehension. Most of the studies reviewed here that are directly related to literature circles have not included an actual measurement of students' level of comprehension through written responses. This review of literature has emphasized a need to delve further into the discussion itself and the effects of the responses given by the students in the context of peer-led discussion. I would like to see how the students' responses reflect one another and how they react to their peers. I will then evaluate how the level of comprehension in the students' written responses was affected by the discussion.

Methodology

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

The focus of this research project is in the process that students undergo in order to understand a text. I focused on how the discussion of a text in literature circles affects student's written responses. A qualitative design was used in this study as an "inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1994, p.2). As a researcher, I used prior knowledge and new information on literature circles and their operational components to collect and analyze data.

Creswell (1994) describes a case study design, "the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon ('the case') bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group) and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time" (p.12). Using the format of a case study design, I was able to analyze my observations, student surveys and students' written responses. Further data collection was used in the form of field notes, and video and audio taping every literature circle session. I studied the responses of five students in the natural setting of a classroom. I used this observational and evaluative information to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of literature discussion circles on students' written responses and their level of comprehension.

Case Study

There were a total of eight literature circle sessions for this descriptive case study. The students met for the first four sessions, the "before" sequence, with a written

response to a chapter they had read prepared before they met in the literature discussion group. For the last four sessions, the "after" sequence, they met in their literature circle before they wrote in their response log.

Table 1 on the next page shows the before and after procedures used to generate written responses to Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh (O'Brien, 1986).

Table 1:

Before Sequence
Students read the designated chapters in the book
Students wrote in their response logs using their choice of prompts
Students gathered in a literature discussion circle and discussed the book
After Sequence
Students read the designated chapters in the book
Students gathered in a literature discussion circle and discussed the book
Students wrote in their response logs using their choice of prompts

Before starting the literature circles, the teacher and I instructed the students in key components of literature circles, such as strategies for effective discussion, materials and assessment tools. We adapted these mini-lessons from Hill et al. (1995) and Daniels (1994). We worked with Dr. Nancy Johnson, one of the authors of (1995) Literature Circles and Response on some of the mini-lessons. A sample lesson topic and reading strategies are provided in Appendix C. Morfitt (1995) explains the need to create a climate for discussion. "When groups meet for the first time, I stress that every member of a literature circle has something to say, and that we all must be careful listeners and speakers. I begin by talking about how to start discussions, how to share what we have to

say, about how to add our ideas if they follow someone else's, and how to respond to questions" (p.30).

After modeling the components of literature circles for approximately 3-4 weeks, with mini-lessons on participation and expectations of group members, we split the students into their literature circle groups where *they* took charge of the discussion. Before dividing students into groups, we did a brief book talk of each book. The students then wrote down their top three choices on a piece of paper and handed it in for us to try to match each student with their choices. Each student was assigned to a literature circle according to what book he/she chose to read. After reading their selected book or chapter, they were given a series of questions adapted from Sloan (1984) and Vandergrift (1990) and "Focus on your Feelings" (Hill et al, 1995) to discuss in their literature circles with their peers.

The Role of the Researcher

I conducted this study at an elementary school where a colleague was conducting a similar study on literature circles. We sent a permission slip to the families of the students we were studying, so that we could audio and video tape the discussion sessions with the approval of the parents (See Appendix A). Administrators also gave their verbal permission. We sent another letter to the parents for permission to use the students' written responses in the appendices (See Appendix A). The students' names were changed to protect their identity and no other information was provided that could break the seal of confidentiality.

I was a participant observer in that I was able to coordinate and plan the mini-lessons on how to begin and structure literature circles with the classroom teacher. We

organized the exact dates and order in which we would present the mini-lessons. Once we were engaged in observing our own separate literature circles, we branched out to study our particular questions of interest. When the literature circles began, I reviewed some of the mini-lessons with the group members. I observed the group's behavior and did not discuss the content of their discussion with them. If they interrupted each other in the group, then I reminded them after their discussion to make sure they listened to each other and gave each member a chance to talk. For each of the eight sessions, I operated the video and audio tapes of the students. I took anecdotal records on each student while they were discussing and if I had any questions about what I wrote I could refer to the tapes (See Appendix F). I took field notes on the mini-lessons that we taught, what the students were doing in their reading/writing workshop and any significant comments made by the students. After evaluating two sessions of the students' written responses with the evaluation form, I noticed that it was not capturing the complexity of their responses. It was only giving a broad general overview of their comments. I decided to include part of Sebesta's et al. (1995) and Smith & Barrett's (1979) taxonomies to better measure their written responses. I added the first level "Knowledge Base / Inference" to separate the student's recall information with their personal responses. I added the last level of "Appreciation" because I consider that to essentially be the highest level, the reader is appreciating the literature for its structure and content whether a reader really enjoyed the text or not. I made my taxonomy hierarchical in nature, theorizing that students follow a process along the levels, taking from each level and building on it.

Figure 1 is shown below.

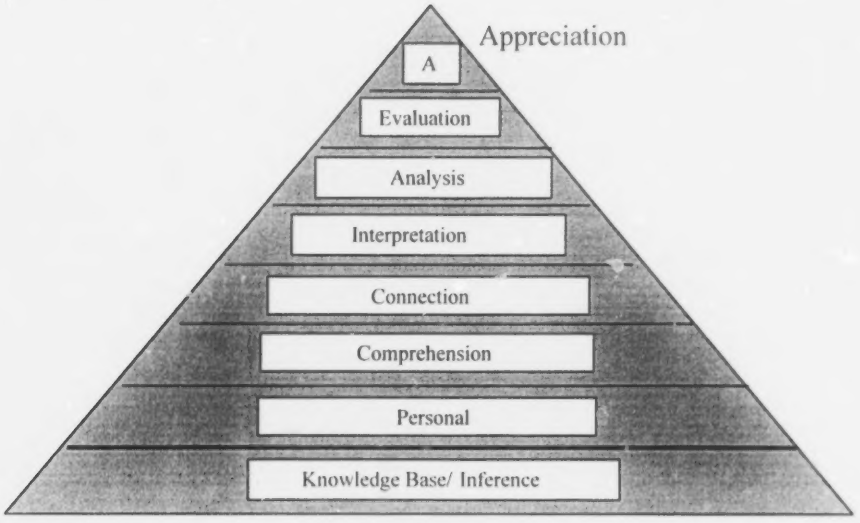

Figure 1: Hierarchical Model of Response

During the middle of the sessions, I decided to show the students' some of the aspects of the discussion that needed work. I showed them video tapes of their discussions. I picked a discussion session for each student that showed a weakness and strength. Each student watched the tape individually and immediately realized what he/she could work on in the discussion. One student realized that she needed to listen more and a few students realized that they needed to talk more.

Classroom Context

Before I began working with the literature circle group, we provided a few weeks of whole class instruction, which helped to build a foundation for a successful literature circle group. The workshop plan listed below was followed every Tuesday and Thursday. The Reading and Writing Workshop was switched when the "after" sequence took place.

On a typical afternoon the workshop started with a read aloud from the classroom teacher followed by a brief mini-lesson. Using examples from the read aloud books, we were able to implement important strategies for successful literature circle discussions. At the beginning of the year, the teacher and I provided the first mini-lessons on reading and writing strategies. "Focus on your Feelings," (Hill et al., 1995) provided prompts for the students to finish, such as "I wonder…", "I feel.." or "I did not understand…" (Appendix D).

Schedule of the Reading/Writing Workshop Plan

12:30-Read Aloud
12:45-Mini-Lesson
1:00-2:30-Silent Reading and Writing Workshop, teacher/student conferences.
Before sequence- write in response logs
After sequence- literature circle discussion
2:30-2:45-Break
2:45-3:10-**Before sequence-** Literature Circles
After sequence- write in response logs
3:30-School Ends

On the first day of literature circles we gave the students an issue from Time for Kids. We addressed the two sets of prompts (Appendix D) that they could use to write in their response logs. They read an article on their own, wrote a response and then we met in a circle and the teachers modeled a literature circle discussion for the students. After the teachers modeled a discussion, there was a brief discussion on the techniques that we used to get the discussion started and focused. The students then formed a discussion group with their tablemates.

The fourth mini-lesson for literature circles was an introduction on how to use open-ended questions. We modeled how to respond to questions with the read aloud book that they were reading at the present time, Hickock's (1958) The Story of Helen Keller. We provided a variety of answers that would adequately answer each particular question. For example, we asked the question, "Do any particular feelings come across in the story?" The students answered that Helen Keller felt frustrated at not being able to

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understand the teacher and her family. She hit things in her frustration. This helped the students to understand possible responses to these open-ended questions.

The fifth mini-lesson addressed a four-sentence requirement. We modeled how a quality written response looked and sounded, and we developed a student-centered rubric for the response. We discussed what makes a quality written response. The class agreed that the written responses needed to do three things: 1) make the reader think, 2) answer a question or describe feelings; and 3) address the reason why the author writes a certain way. The students said the responses should include four sentences, support from the text and go beyond the basic requirements. We introduced the fantasy unit with a brief description of the definition of fantasy and asked students to share any experiences they had with the genre of fantasy. We chose Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Dahl, 1998), The Fledgling (Langton, 1995), Wind in the Willows (Grahame, 1989), Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh (O'Brien, 1986), Cricket in Times Square (Selden, 1960), and Castle in the Attic (Winthrop, 1986) because we felt that these books fit the students' reading levels and were appropriate for the fantasy genre. The next week, we gave a book talk about each book by summarizing the book and reading the review blurb on the back of the book. The students selected their top three choices. We matched everyone with a first or second choice book and had approximately six students for each group. The books used were Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Dahl, 1998), The Fledgling (Langton, 1995), Castle in the Attic (Winthrop, 1986), and Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh (O'Brien, 1986). I decided to work with the book Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh (O'Brien, 1986) because that particular group of students was diverse in reading

and writing levels and I felt that I could gather a wide range of written responses from them. We announced the groups the next day.

The sixth mini-lesson introduced an example of a good literature circle discussion. The classroom teacher read the book Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge (Fox, 1985) to the class during the read aloud time. Then the classroom teacher, Dr. Johnson and I discussed the book in front of the class. We recorded anecdotal records similar to the form that I chose to use in my research. Anecdotal observations shared with the students were: 1) listens to everyone in the group with their eyes, ears and body, 2) shows enjoyment, 3) shares their reaction to the chapter, 4) explains why they feel that way or why they think a certain way and 5) discusses the author's craft such as, creating suspense, and different openings and endings to the book. After the teachers' sample discussion, the students discussed their observations.

The seventh mini-lesson involved two skits on constructive and not constructive behaviors in discussions. The classroom teacher and I wrote a script called, "Moving in the Right Direction," which we gave to four students to perform. After the skit was performed for the class, the students concluded that the following characteristics make a quality discussion:

- Paying attention.
- Having a discussion that is related to the book.
- Having pencil and book down when others are talking.
- Sitting in a circle at close proximity to each other and at the same level.
- Everyone in the group shared.
- They asked questions about the book, "What do you mean," and " I don't

understand".

- The actors did not interrupt each other.

Another skit called, "Needs Work," included four students who performed after the first group. The class discussed what some of the problems were in this group and how they could address them. We frequently referred back to the first skit.

The eighth mini-lesson modeled another discussion strategy, "How to begin, how to keep going." First, we focused on the role of the facilitator. The facilitator knows which chapter the group is on, gives gentle reminders to the group to listen and stays focused. Then we discussed asking questions that we do not necessarily have answers to, such as, "I wonder what will happen in the next chapter." One technique is to have everyone think of a question in the group and take turns listening and answering one another's questions. Another technique for literature circles is to think about how your discussion helps your writing.

We discussed response logs with the students. We asked them what they thought about them and some offered that it helps their writing by organizing it into a clear argument for their thoughts. We felt that the students were ready to start their literature circles after this series of mini-lessons.

I showed the students in my group the videotapes of themselves in their literature circle group, as a mini-lesson. My purpose for this viewing was to show the students aspects of their behavior in the discussion that they needed to evaluate and possibly change. They watched the video taping of a particular session that either they were not participating in as much or where they needed to see how they were responding to the other group members. Most of the time I just let them watch it and see what they said

about their own behavior. Most of them picked up what I was trying to call to their attention. For instance, Tom was not speaking during some of the first sessions. He immediately said, "I'm not saying anything." I gave him some ideas on how to get the other group members' attention. I also showed the one student that was absent in this study that he was dominating the discussion. He just looked at me and said, " I am talking too much." I told him that it is good that he is talking, however just make sure to listen as well. This proved to be a valuable tool and it was a good way to show them how they are responding without verbally telling them. This also helps them to self-correct a response that might prohibit their learning. On occasion I let them listen to some of the audio tapes for fun.

Setting

The students were given a Reading and Writing Workshop Plan (Appendix C). They were provided time in the morning and in the afternoon during reading and writing workshop time to read one literature circle book, Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh (O'Brien, 1986). They were allowed to take their books home if they needed to finish their assigned chapters. The students could write in their response logs (Appendix E) at their tables or on the floor in a designated area. The literature circle that I observed was held in the school's drama room next door to the classroom. It was held in this room so that the video and audio recordings could be heard and not distract the other students. At other times when another class was using the drama room, my literature circle group was held in the hallway or in a resource room located near the classroom. The drama room was very similar to the students' classroom in size and look. It was a rather large room lined with windows facing the playground. The students rarely looked out the window,

however they did become distracted with the drama room stage before the discussions started. The students sat on the floor during their discussion groups in the drama room. When the drama room was occupied, they sat on chairs in the hallway. This rearrangement of setting did not appear to bother the students. They were flexible in moving to different locations.

Population

The study was conducted in a fourth/ fifth grade classroom located in Western Washington in a town of about 60,000 people. The school was located in a higher income neighborhood. The classroom as a whole consisted of 24 students, 21 of whom were of Caucasian descent and two of Asian descent. Six Caucasian students from this class participated in my study. Students were self-selected by their choice of book. I worked with the students who chose Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh (O'Brien, 1986). Although six students were in the group, I limited the analysis to five students due to the high absenteeism of one student. Of the six students, four had participated in literature circles before.

Demographic data in Table 2 is shown on the next page:

Table 2: Student Portraits

Student # (Grade)	Participated in Literature Circles Before	Books Preferred	Likes to Discuss Books	DRP Score Independent Rdg. Level	DRP Score Instructional Rdg. Level
Dana (4)	NO	Fiction / Sci. Fiction	YES	77	88
Cecilia (4)	YES	Everything	Sometimes	56	67
Don (4)	YES	Comedy / Fiction	YES	45	56
Tom (5)	NO	Non-fiction	NO	45	56
Kara (5)	YES	Harry Potter	NO	45	56

Fourth Grade Reading Level DRP score is: 44-47
Fifth Grade Reading Level DRP score is: 50-54

Student Portraits

The following student portraits are drawn from conversations with the students, their pre-surveys (Appendix B), observing their behavior in class and the observations made during the Literature Circle discussion time (Anecdotal Records, Appendix F). The students' Degrees of Reading Power scores are included to show their reading level. I video and audio taped the discussions to use as a support for observations.

Dana - Grade 4:

Dana had not participated in a literature circle before. She enjoys fiction and science fiction and tells her family everything she reads in detail. She wants to read Indian Captive (Lenski,1941) for reading workshop. Dana is a self-described avid reader who told me, "I read whenever there is a book in front of me, and I don't think I can read anymore, because I read all the time!! (I even get in trouble sometimes, when I read instead of doing my chores!)". She enjoys Harry Potter by (Rowling, 1998) and Holes by (Sachar, 1998). She used many exclamation points in her writing.

Roles taken in the literature circle: One of the most active participants of the group, Dana consistently asked thoughtful questions which appeared to keep the group on track and begin dialogue. She dominated the conversation during literature circle discussion time, but not to the extent of overriding other student responses. She succinctly summarized the chapters for an absent student on her own and provided feedback to their questions after a discussion one day.

Written Response Logs: Dana began to write clearly and thoughtfully in her response logs becoming more evaluative and appreciative at times. She supported her predictions with clues from the text and made connections to the characters.

Cecelia – Grade 4:

Cecelia had participated in literature circles before. She reads everything, but mostly chapter books. She does not discuss books unless she really likes them. Cecelia says, "Mom says that I read too much, (I need) to balance it with life". She is a strong reader and often borrowed a book from the teacher and read it in one night.

Roles taken in the literature circle: Cecelia was a strong voice in the discussion groups. She supported her comments by using many quotes from the text during the discussions. She would grab her book and pronounce excitedly, "I remember Nicodemus said …" and look it up in the book. Cecelia asked questions and drew conclusions from the text. She seemed to show enjoyment by clapping her hands and her voice got louder when she heard new information from her peers. Her questions were insightful and she listened carefully to her peers by commenting, "I never noticed that before" or "I answered my own question."

Written Responses: Cecelia's response log entries started on the lower levels of the taxonomy, then she had strong entries in the fourth session of the "before" sequence. The response log entries gradually increased in level going from Comprehension (Level 3) to Analysis (Level 6) in the "after" sequences. I noticed, however, that after the discussions the entries were not as descriptive and were shorter. She mentioned having other homework to do.

Don – Grade 4:

Don had participated in literature circles before. He reads at home and enjoys comedy and fiction. He discusses "Far Side" comics by Gary Larson with his friends and family.

Roles taken in the literature circle: Don initially wrote with great potential in his writing, but he did not speak much in the discussion. He appeared to be listening, but he did not assert himself in the discussions. Toward the end of the sessions, with the absence of one dominant voice, he expressed himself more. In the discussions, he looked at the table of contents and quotes from the text for help. He asked questions of his classmates such as, "What did you think of the chapters so far?" Sometimes in the "after" sequence he brought up a question to start the discussion. I suggested to him if he wanted to talk in the group he might need to raise his hand more and say "Excuse me, I would like to comment on that." He took my advice and was able to capture the groups' attention. He began to take an active role in the discussions.

Written Responses: With this increase in participation, his response logs became more evaluative and even appreciative. He began to write more and took more time to write. His responses were longer and showed the effects of the discussion in the after sessions.

Tom – Grade 5:

Tom had not participated in literature circles before. He reads non-fiction books and does not usually discuss books with others.

Roles taken in the literature circle: A quiet, but insightful student, Tom had a great capacity to look for answers to questions that have not been asked and are essential to understanding the text better. For instance, he constantly asked, "I wonder what Nimh is?" He asked so softly that the other students talked right over him. In the beginning, Tom barely spoke, but exhibited interest and enjoyment by watching the other members of the group and nodding his head in agreement. Toward the end of the sessions, he talked more when a dominant speaker of the group was absent. When I showed Tom and Don a video tape of their group, they both noticed that they were not talking. I then told them how they might get the group members' attention by raising their hands and saying that they would like to speak. Toward the end of the sessions they were actively participating in the discussions. In those discussions, Tom looked to the text to provide support, such as the table of contents and passages he read earlier that he wanted to share. On the third session of the "after" sequence, he asked four questions.

Written Responses: Tom's written responses increased in level as his participation increased, indicating a positive response to the discussions. He began to make more connections to the characters, interpretations, analysis and evaluations about the text in the "after" sequence.

Kara – Grade 5:

Kara had participated in literature circles before. She reads Harry Potter (Rowling, 1998) books and she does not discuss books with her family. She wants to read more Harry Potter books this year. Kara indicated that she would like to practice reading and wants

us (the teachers) to get interesting books. Kara told her mother that she wanted to be a waitress and thought that she should not have to work hard in school.

Roles taken in the literature circles: During the discussion, she usually disagreed with the other group members on where and how to sit, what chapters to read or how they should respond in the response log entries. She dominated the conversations with thoughtful ideas but did not display this in her written work. She appeared to put less effort than the others into her written work and in the other courses that involved writing. I gave her several suggestions for writing, but she retold the chapter and did not expand on ideas. In the discussion, Kara started the conversations and tried to get the students back on the subject. On the second session of the "before" sequence, she was the facilitator and asked five questions. She expressed her feelings three times and drew conclusions three times. When she watched herself on the video tape, she realized that she was interrupting other students. After that experience, she began to listen to the other students more. The group members reminded her when she interrupted as well.

Written Responses: Kara's written responses started out low on the taxonomy and gradually increased to the higher levels of interpretation and analysis. With prompting, she was able to write an interpretive response on the last session of the literature circles.

Data Collection Procedures

There were a total of eight literature circle discussion sessions for this study. I structured four sessions where students wrote in their response logs *before* they met in their literature circles. I referred to these four sessions as the "before" sequence. Then I structured four sessions where the students wrote in their response logs *after* they met in their literature circles. I referred to these four sessions as the "after" sequence. This helped me to see how the discussion affected their level of comprehension in their written work. I adapted a series of open-ended questions using Sloan (1984) and Vandergrift's (1990) models (Appendix D), for students to consider for their response logs. Another prompt, called "Focus on your Feelings" was used to help students generate responses. Whether they were written before or after the discussion, they used these prompts to start their writing.

I used three procedures for my data collection: pre-surveys, teacher anecdotal records and written response evaluation forms. I used the video and audio tapes to check my perceptions of the sessions and how they influenced the students' writing.

Pre-surveys: As suggested in Samway's (1991) article, I decided to use pre-surveys to assess student's attitudes towards literature circles. The survey focused on the students' experience with literature circles and their reading habits. They received this form the first week of school. The pre-surveys gave me a glimpse of the prior experience the students had with literature circles and if they liked to discuss books. I adapted some ideas for the questions from the forms provided in Hill 's et al. (1995) book. The pre-survey is located in Appendix B.

Teacher Anecdotal Records Form: One of the teacher's forms was a record that assessed

the students' participation and understanding of the literature circle discussion. The teacher anecdotal record form helped me to evaluate the students' participation and how much they used communication strategies. I filled this out while observing the students' discussions, alternating between the students to better record their oral responses. Recorded comments were coded according to the different components of comprehension and understanding achieved. The anecdotal notes focused on participation, making connections to personal experiences with the book, asking questions, making predictions, retelling the main idea, using text to support the main idea, referring to elements of literature and making connections to other books and authors (See Appendix F).

Teacher's Evaluation of Written Responses: This form evaluates the written responses in the students' reading logs according to the collection of taxonomies that I developed using Bloom et al. (1956), Hancock (2000), Vandergrift (1990), Sebesta et al. (1995) and Smith & Barrett (1979) (See Appendix G). This form was used to assess students' level of comprehension. I wrote back to the students in their reading logs with a post-it note with any suggestions or positive comments for future reflection.

Video/Audio Tapes: The video and audio tapes were useful in two ways: 1) they provided me with additional perspective and clarification concerning the discussion sessions, and 2) the students were able to view their behaviors in the discussion. When I showed the selected video tapes of the sessions to the students, they began to change their behaviors in the discussion accordingly.

Data Analysis Procedures

I analyzed four data gathering instruments for my data analysis. All four forms were used to aid me in clarifying my perceptions of what was happening in the literature circles and how that was influencing the students' written responses.

Pre-surveys: The pre-surveys were analyzed for prior experience in literature circle discussions and attitude in discussing books with others. I found that three students had participated in literature circles before and two had not. Two students indicated that they liked to discuss books, while two students said they did not and the fifth said sometimes they liked to discuss books. According to the DRP scores, all of the fourth grade students were at or above grade level in reading. The fifth grade students were above grade level in instructional reading level, but slightly below in independent reading level. See Table 1 on page 18.

Teacher Anecdotal Record Form: The students seemed to show a variety of interest in the anecdotal records. Most students showed enjoyment in the discussion especially Dana and Cecelia. Gradually, Tom and Don began to show enjoyment in the discussion as well. Kara showed interest and enjoyment at the beginning of the discussion, but sometimes their interest waned toward the end. In the first two sessions, students brought their response logs and shared their written responses. Another reading and discussion strategy that was used quite frequently was providing support from the text, making predictions, asking questions and drawing conclusions from the text. Each student showed listening discussion strategies, their top three are recorded below:

Dana: Shares reaction, discusses author's craft and provides support from the text.

Cecelia: Asks questions, draws conclusions and provides support from the text

Don: Provides support from the text, asks questions, and makes predictions

Tom: Asks questions, shares reaction, and relates to personal experience

Kara: Asks questions, draws conclusions, and expresses feelings

Teacher's Evaluation of Written Responses: The written response logs were analyzed according to an adaptation of the collections of Bloom et al. (1956), Hancock (2000), Vandergrift (1990), Sebesta et al. (1995) and Smith & Barrett's (1979) taxonomies (Appendix H). See written examples from students' work in Table 3 on the next page.

Table 3: Categories of Written Responses

Category of Written Response	Example from Students' Work
Knowledge Base/ Inference - Level 1	"Mrs. Frisby has gone to the rosebush"
Personal - Level 2	"I think that it's sort of sad that six of the mice got blown back in the pipe".
Comprehension - Level 3	"I thought it was cool how the rats have electricity and an elevator and a library"
Connection - Level 4	"This story makes you think the owl will eat Mrs. Frisby. The story makes you think that because in some non-fiction books about birds it says that owls eat mice"
Interpretation – Level 5	"Maybe Nimh is an all white lab, where Nicodemus gets smarter, and learns to read, or go through a maze".
Analysis – Level 6	"In the beginning of the story, the main characters were the mice. Now the main character is Nicodemus and how he is telling the story. Because he is telling the story about how they got there".
Evaluation – Level 7	"I felt the author made a good description of the gate on page 145, at the boniface estate, "we reached a very high fence of wrought iron, the kind that looks like a row of black iron spears fastened together with pointed tops".
Appreciation – Level 8	"I think these chapters were the most interesting yet. I think the author might have worked the hardest on these last chapters. I think that because of all the little details, and the way he described them. Like on page 140, he said, "blown backward into a dark maze of tunnels", instead of just plain old blown backwards".

The levels of written response will range from 1-8 provided in Appendix G. The first level, *Knowledge Base/ Inference*, refers to the reader recalling the events of the story and building on previously learned material (Smith & Barrett, 1979, p.63). This might include the main idea, defining words or providing the "who," "what," "why," or "where" descriptions (Vandergrift, 1990). For example, Kara wrote, " Mrs. Frisby has

gone to the rosebush." If she had elaborated on this point, it might have been recorded at a higher level.

The second level, *Personal*, categorizes the readers' responses as subjective and personal. "Responses include, personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, morals or beliefs," (Vandergrift, 1990). For example, Cecelia wrote, " I think that it's sort of sad that six of the mice got blown back in the pipe". In that instance, if she explained why she did not like the mice going through the tunnels then she would have reached the analysis level.

The third level, *Comprehension*, is where the readers grasp the overall meaning of the text including knowledge base and personal responses. They are able to identify the key components in the text including the theme, genre, literary or historical text, setting, plot, point of view, language or characters. The readers also seek meaning from the illustrations (Vandergrift, 1990; Bloom et al. 1956; and Sebesta et al. 1995). Tom wrote, "I thought it was cool how the rats have electricity and an elevator and a library." Tom is able to comprehend and have a reaction to the setting.

The fourth level, *Connection*, is where the readers interpret meaning and are able to generalize it to broader phenomena. They apply their own life experiences to text and compare it to different pieces of work and other texts. They make a character assessment. "Responses indicate the reader's judgment of the actions or values of the character measure against his/her own personal values or standards of behavior" (Hancock, 2000 p.337). For example: "I wonder…," shows they are able to dig deeper into the text and plot by trying to figure out the characters' actions. They make text to text and text to life connections and they may compare the current text to other texts or

movies that they have seen. Dana wrote, " I wonder if I was Mrs. Frisby, would I read the plan?" Dana is connecting herself to the character and wondering what she would do in the character's situation.

The fifth level, *Interpretation*, is where the readers are able to use the learned materials from the text in a new or concrete situation to which they will apply their new-found knowledge. They are able to reexamine their own views, think about other points of view and hypothesize, generalize and empathize from their world to the outside world. They also may make predictions as to what will emerge from the text (Bloom et al. 1956). For example, Dana wrote, "Maybe Nimh is an all white lab, where Nicodemus gets smarter, and learns to read, or go through a maze." Dana is able to gather the evidence and make a qualified prediction based on that evidence.

The sixth level, *Analysis*, is where the readers analyze the relevance the text has to the genre, time period, characters and author. Readers provide support from the text emphasizing a justification for their opinions, theories or predictions. Tom wrote, "I got the idea that Nimh was a laboratory when I read "In the Marketplace." Tom is exhibiting evidence from the text for his predictions. Another example from Cecelia, "In the beginning of the story, the main characters were the mice. Now the main character is Nicodemus and how he is telling the story. Because he is telling the story about how they got there." In this example, Cecelia is analyzing the author's use of structure in the story and why it was necessary for him to place the characters in a certain order.

The seventh level, *Evaluation*, is where the readers judge the merits of a piece of work on a "personal, literary, social or moral criteria" (Vandergrift, 1990, p.40). Readers are able to evaluate genre, author's craft, provide support and justify their

opinions. For example, Tom wrote, "I felt the author made a good description of the gate on page 145, at the boniface estate, "we reached a very high fence of wrought iron, the kind that looks like a row of black iron spears fastened together with pointed tops." Tom is evaluating the author's craft by judging the author's use of language, and he supports it from the text.

The eighth level, *Appreciation*, is where the reader's awareness of literary technique, forms, styles and structures allow the readers to respond emotionally as well as in an appreciative manner. This level allows the reader to combine all the previous levels and appreciate the text in the manner in which it was presented. Readers understand and appreciate the aesthetic qualities of the stimulating plots, themes, settings, incidents, language and characters. Readers are able to respond emotionally, identify with the characters or situations, react to the author's style and use of language and the imagery of "painting words with pictures" (Smith & Barrett, 1979, p.66). For example, Don wrote, "I think these chapters were the most interesting yet. I think the author might have worked the hardest on these last chapters. I think that because of all the little details, and the way he described them. Like on page 140, he said 'blown backward into a dark maze of tunnels', instead of just plain old 'blown backwards' ". Don is not only evaluating the author's work, "he worked the hardest on these last chapters," but he is justifying why he thinks this way and he supports his opinion with a quote from the text. He shows an appreciation for the author's craft and is able to explain why.

The levels of oral response collected through the anecdotal notes were evaluated according to the coded notes. These records served as an aid to the written response notes and were used for my own personal records for literature circles. The

written evaluation forms showed an increase in the higher comprehension levels. Interpretation, Analysis, Evaluation and Appreciation.

Student's Written Evaluations

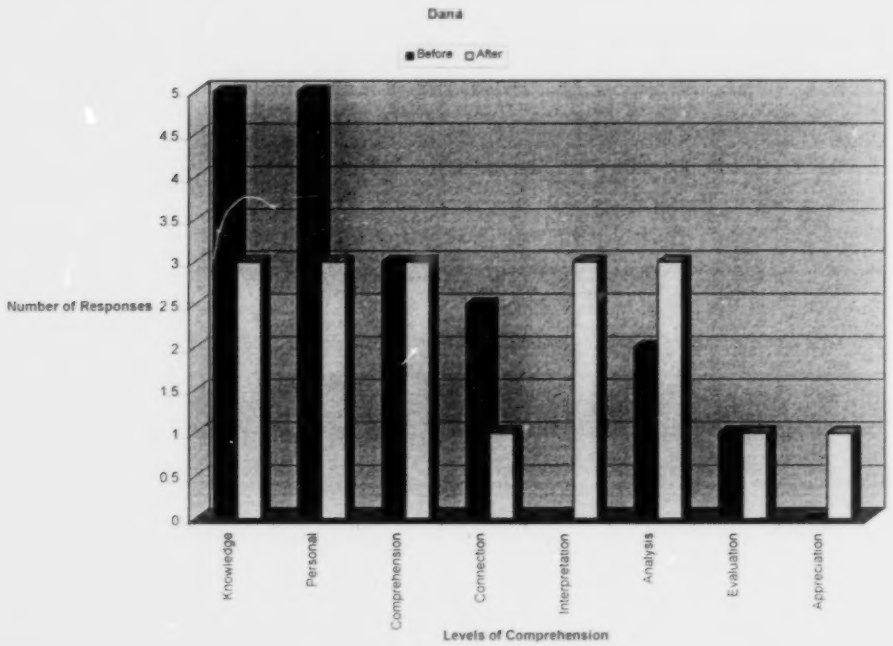
Students' written responses are provided in the form of quotes and graphs indicating their increases and decreases in their level of comprehension.

Dana's Written Evaluation: Dana showed enjoyment and definite excitement when writing about the chapters. In this quote, she writes about the rats' hurt feelings.

> I think that it was nice of Robert C. O'Brien to tell in his book that Rats have feelings too, because some people might not respect Rats, so they can see, (even though this is fiction) that they can have hurt feelings and mean and nice and sad feelings. That is kind and considerate to the rats. (every body has feelings!). (3rd session of the after sequence, Appendix I)

Dana feels that lipstick and cosmetics should not be used on rats. In many instances, she shows feelings for the characters. Dana loves to read and seemed to make connections to the rats and their feelings and fears. She related to what she read about society's treatment of animals and felt that it was wrong to test cosmetics on animals. Dana also shows excitement and humor through her pictures in her response logs. For example, one response showed pictures of girls in pigtails and many exclamation points at the end of the sentences. Her responses showed insight and justification for her predictions, so I wrote "Wow!" on her paper. Her response for the next day had "wow" and exclamation points after several sentences. I think she was excited that I said "Wow" and I received a whole series of "wow's" in her next two responses.

In the "before" sequence of the discussion sessions, she made two Connections (fourth level), two Analysis (sixth level), and one Evaluation (seventh level). In the "after" sequence, she improved to three Interpretations (fifth level), three Analysis (sixth level), one Evaluation (seventh level), and one Appreciation (eighth level). Dana began to provide more support from the text and commented on the author's craft. Dana usually exhibited a positive attitude and enthusiasm in her responses.



Cecelia's Written Evaluations: Cecelia's response logs are thoughtful, but appear to vary in effort. She makes connections to other books and refers to the text for predictions. According to the taxonomy, Cecelia has increased her level of comprehension in the "after" sequences. In the "before" sequence she makes one connection and one evaluation. In the "after" sequences there are two connections, three analysis and one evaluation.

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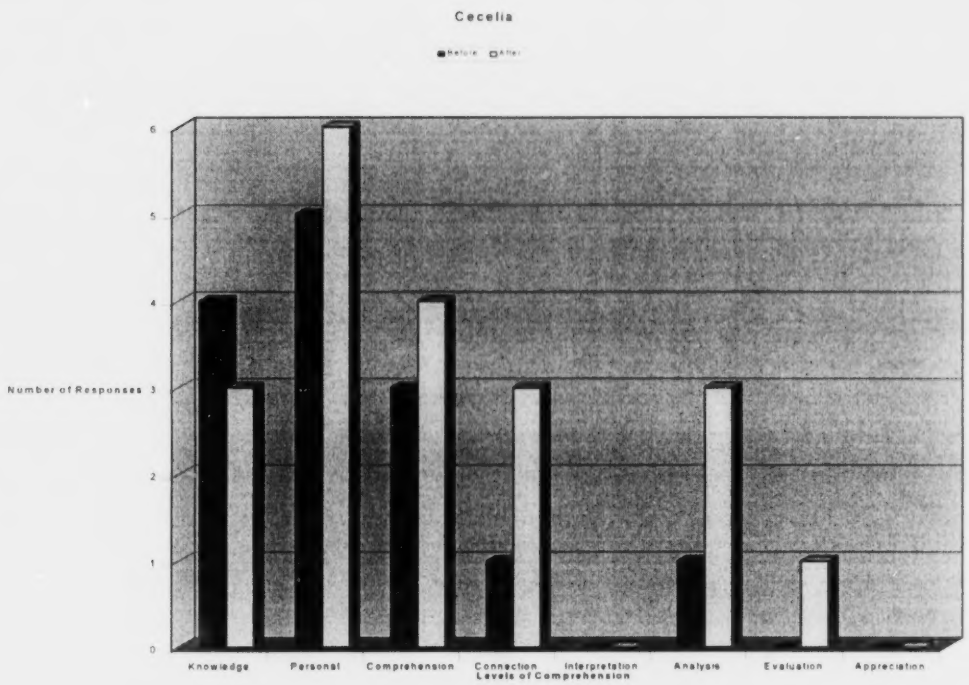
Cecelia understands why the characters are arranged in the book the way they are. She comments on the sequence of events and why they are arranged in a particular manner. In the fourth session of the "after" sequence, Cecelia writes:

> In the beginning of the story the main characters were the mice. Now the main character is Nicodemus and how he is telling the story. Because he's telling the story about how they got there.

In the group sessions on this day the students were trying to figure out why the author was now writing about Nicodemus (not a main character until this point). This response was categorized as Analysis (sixth level). Cecelia stayed at the Comprehension (third) level until the fourth session of the "before" sequence. She made one Connection (fourth level), and one Analysis (sixth) level of response. In the "after" sequence, she made three Connections (fourth level), three Analysis (sixth level), and one Evaluation (seventh) level of response. Cecelia started to provide more support from the text, commented on author's craft and made more connections to one of the main characters, Mrs. Frisby.



Don's Written Evaluations: Don's writing deepened in complexity and his level of comprehension increased in his evaluations. In response to prompts, he had taken on a new level of responses that were thoughtful and insightful. Don provided text support from names of chapters to predicting what will happen in the book or next chapter. He provided text-to-text references about owls eating mice, and associated it to the book. "The story makes you think the owl will eat Mrs. Frisby. The story makes you think that because in some nonfiction books about birds it says owls eat mice" (third session of "before" sequence).

In the "after" sequences, Don provided justification for his observations. He evaluates the author's use of language and provides a quote.

> I think these chapters were the most interesting yet. I think the author might have worked the hardest on these last chapters. I think that because of all the little

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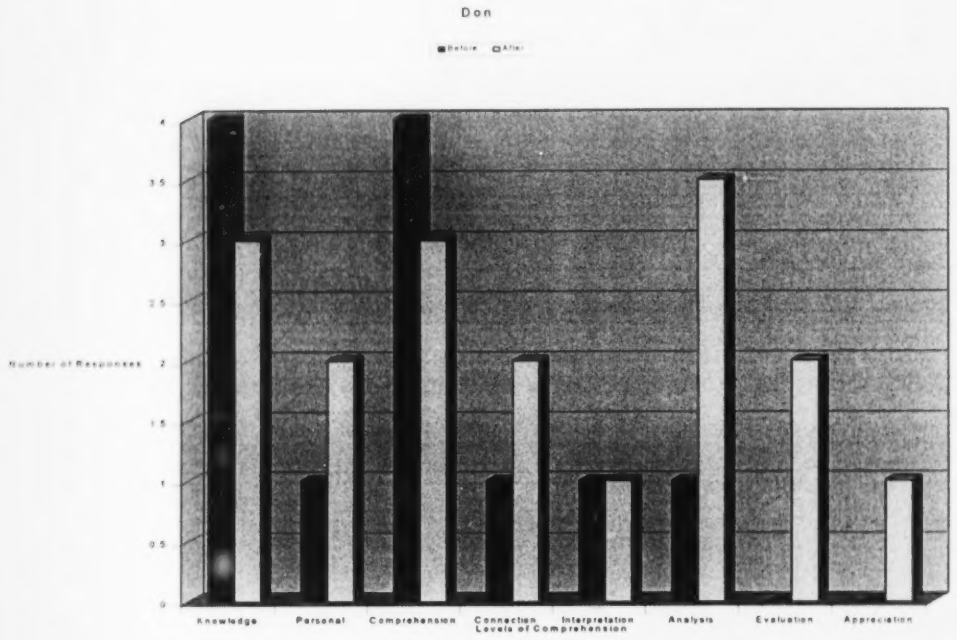
> details, and the way he described them. Like on page 140 he said, "Blown backward into a dark maze of tunnels", Instead of just plain, old blown backwards (third session of "after" sequence, Appendix I).

Don had exhibited the ability to analyze and appreciate the author's craft in this particular response log entry. Don increased dramatically in his written responses from the "before" sequence to the "after" sequence. He started the first session with mostly Comprehension (third level) responses. He had only one Connection (fourth level), one Interpretation (fifth level), and one Analysis (sixth level). I noted that he was making more recall or retell responses and he was not deepening his responses to the author's craft. In the "after" sequence he increased to making more connections and evaluating the author's craft. He made two Connections (fourth level), one Interpretation (fifth level), three Analysis (sixth level), two Evaluation (seventh level), and one Appreciation (eighth level). Don provided more justification for why he thought a certain way. See an example of Don's written responses in Appendix I.



Tom's Written Evaluations: Tom went from making one Connection (fourth level) in the "before" sequence to two Connections, three Interpretations (fifth level), three Analysis (sixth level) and one Evaluation (seventh level) in the "after" sequence. He always made an effort and his short, but insightful responses were improving. His wording was quite articulate in most of his responses. On the third session in the "after" sequence, (Appendix I) he evaluated the author's use of language:

> I felt that the author made good description of the gate at the boniface estate on page 145 "we reached a very high fence of wrought iron, the kind that looks like a row of black iron spears fastened together with pointed tops".

I noticed that Tom's writing improved as his confidence in his speaking in the discussion group improved. Tom's responses increased in the "after" sequence of his written responses (See Appendix I). Tom demonstrated strength in not only asserting himself in

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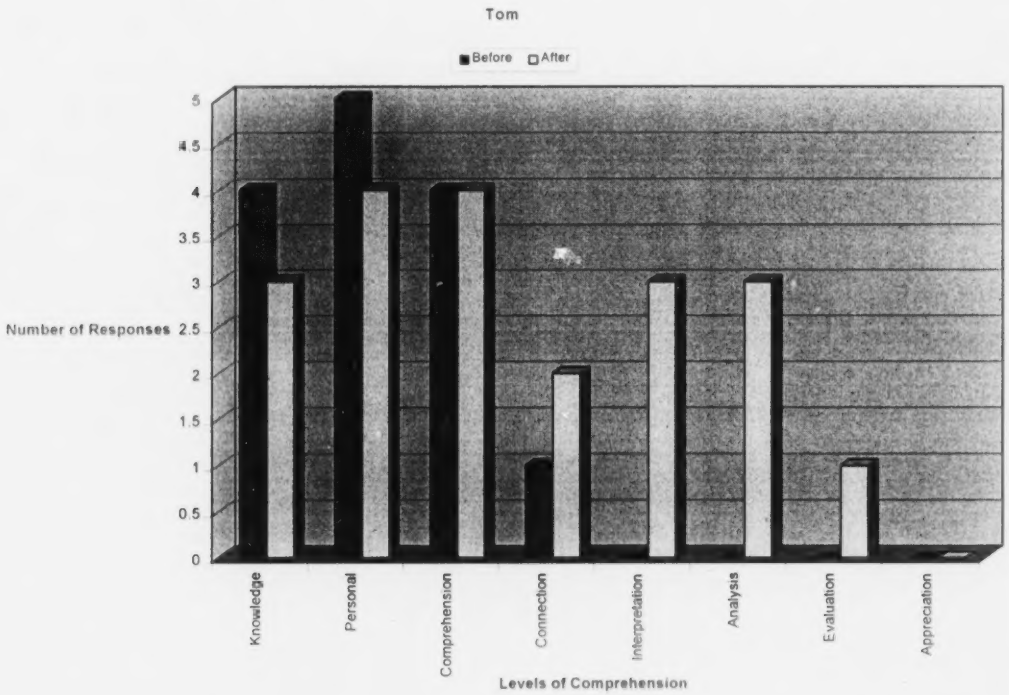
the literature circle discussions, but in his writing as well. He began to provide support from the text more often and he evaluated the author's use of language.



Kara's Written Evaluations: In Kara's first response she explained and provided support from the text on how the story starts. She provided great detail in the summary of the chapters. On the fourth session of the "after" sequence, she wrote:

> I think that it is impossible to have little wrenches and things small enough for rats. In a human store, they couldn't buy them. They didn't have money. Or the salesman would be wide-eyed to have a rat buying their merchandise. They'd probably steal it but how? "And the beauty was, since they were designed for working on toys, they were small enough for us to handle." I liked that quote and the way that Robert C. O'Brien put it.

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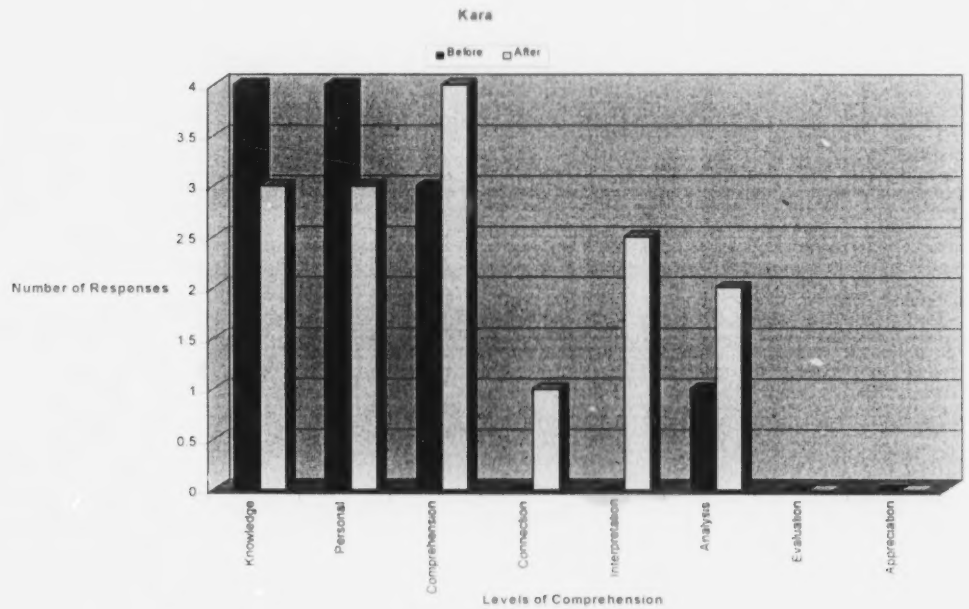
I asked her continually to evaluate the author's craft or focus on her feelings in her writing. She did not usually answer my written questions unless I repeated them verbally. Then I directed some very specific questions to her and she came up with the response above. I wrote post-it notes on the response entries in her response log that needed the most attention. In addition to the post-it notes, I verbalized some of my comments to her while she was writing. Kara did not exceed the Comprehension (third level), except for one Analysis (sixth level), in her responses in the "before" sequence. In the "after" sequence she made four Comprehension level (third level), one Connection (fourth level), two Interpretation (fifth level), and two Analysis (sixth level) responses. On the third session of the "after" sequence she wanted to see how the rats were really reading. She also wanted to know how the rats knew to call the air ducts, "air ducts" (See Appendix I).



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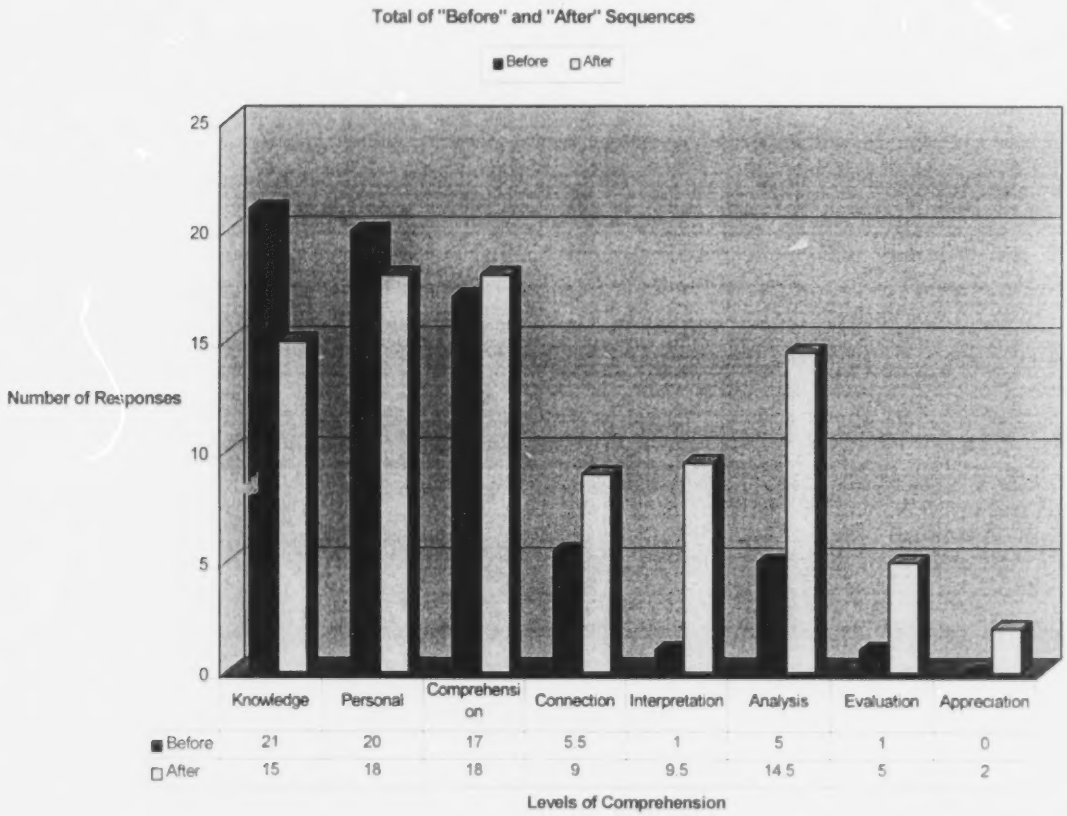
According to my *Evaluation Form for Written Responses,* (Appendix H), in the first four sessions the students responded in their logs before they held a discussion. Then they gathered together in their literature circle and had a 15-20 minute discussion either on what they wrote in their response logs or questions they might have had while reading the book. The students chose to start their first discussion by reading aloud from their response logs to the other students in the group.

In evaluating the students' written responses I compared the total number of responses in both the "before" and "after" sequences. See Figure 2.

Figure 2:



The students' level of comprehension reflected in the written responses increased

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to the more complex levels of interpretive and evaluative in the "after" sequence. The students evaluated the author's craft, provided support from the text and made connections to the characters exhibited in the analysis and evaluative levels of response.

All five students showed improvement in their participation in the literature discussion circles in addition to increasing their comprehension in their written responses after the discussion. A number of factors could have affected their responses.

- As they discussed with their group members, they became clearer on the text's literary elements and content.
- As the group became more comfortable with each other they were able to open up and share their reactions to the text, thus helping each other to understand the text better.
- They began to express their feelings, predictions, and understandings of the text more when they wrote in their response logs after they discussed.
- Their experiences and the natural, active roles that they took in the literature circle itself became clearer. They began to understand the concept of literature circles and their purpose.
- There is a natural progression through the hierarchical process of response that enabled the students to move fluidly through the different levels of comprehension.

These factors are the most important conclusions that I have made from analyzing these written responses and from my observations. I noticed that all the students' responses were high on one particular session in the "after" sequence. The third session of the "after" sequence elicited deeper and higher levels of response than the other sessions. On

this day, we prefaced the discussion with a quick reminder to not interrupt each other in the discussion. After viewing the video tape, I realized that this was the most constructive session, yet. I wondered if it was due to the absence of a dominant student, my reminders of not interrupting, or if the students became comfortable talking with one another. They talked about the author's use of words and why he had to talk about every single aspect of the rats' lives. This session also provided opportunities for Don and Tom to talk more than they ever had. Cecelia asked Don if he had anything to say and he said "not yet." Tom asserted himself more, by saying "I have a question" and then asking it. Kara commented on the author's craft and she said she understood why Robert C. O'Brien talked about each word in detail. They did not interrupt each other as much and seemed to be enjoying themselves as in a conversation instead of a structured discussion. The group concluded by deciding chapters they would read and said they were excited to see what would happen next in the story. See the written responses for this session in Appendix I.

Methods for Verification

Internal Validity

Results were verified by triangulation. Three types of data were collected and analyzed; 1) student pre-surveys 2) anecdotal records and 3) student written response logs. Video and audio tapes were also used. I addressed the internal validity of the study through these three aspects of the data collection and analysis. I discussed my findings with the classroom teacher as well.

External Validity

The external validity was addressed by using a model for assessing students' written responses. I tested my taxonomy with education students in a Basic Reading Instruction class at a local university. When I compared my rating of the responses to their ratings, most were similar to my findings.

Teachers can generalize this study to their own classroom by understanding and utilizing literature circles and the assessment of written responses. This study can be duplicated in the major components, but not the same setting.

Results

Comprehension of a text does not happen overnight. With the help of literature circles however, literary elements become more manageable when discussed. When readers use their prior knowledge, build on their experiences and draw from those experiences to better understand the text, then they reach higher levels of understanding. Daniels (1994) states, "The pathway to analysis, to more sophisticated and defensible interpretations of literature, must go through personal response, not around it" (p. 34). Peer support and the ability to verbally communicate ideas help substantiate understanding of the text.

Grand Tour Question: How does a literature circle discussion around one book, affect students' written responses according to my taxonomy?

The results of this study showed that the students utilized their discussions to propel them into higher-level written responses by taking ideas and concepts from their peers and applying them to their own experiences as readers. The literature discussion circles allowed the students to focus their thoughts during the discussion and reorganize them into a written summary and response for their response logs. There are many factors that could contribute to these higher-level responses. Since the students preferred writing *after* they read and held their literature circle discussion, I can only surmise that this in turn helped them comprehend the text better and write a more interpretive, evaluative and appreciative response.

Do literature circle discussions increase and expand student's level of understanding to elicit a more interpretive, analytical, evaluative and/or appreciative written response?

The students' graphs and evaluation forms exhibited a dramatic difference in the "after" sequences of the literature discussion circles. The students were making more connections to the text, thus boosting their ability to make sound judgments on the author's craft. Don and Tom wrote about the author's use of language in their "after" sequences. They provided support from the text emphasizing a justification for their opinions, theories and predictions by using quotes and page numbers from the text.

In the students' anecdotal records they were making connections to the characters and the outside world. Dana and Cecelia talked about the mistreatment of the rats in the laboratory and how they did not think it was right that people tested cosmetics on animals. The discussion continued with the ethical dilemma of the treatment and use of animals in laboratory testing. These students were able to break through the surface level of the book and dig deeper into the social issues addressed in this story. This event shows what a profound effect discussion can have on written responses. This particular discussion catapulted one student to design her whole response around the treatment of animals and the ethical issues that Robert C. O'Brien instigated in this book. Whether or not Mr. O'Brien intended the book's theme to include the ethical treatment of animals, Dana concluded that as a possible theme.

Kara wondered how the rats could buy tools in a human store. She made these text-to-life connections after participating in the discussions with her classmates and some prompting from me. She was able to use the discussions to elicit higher level responses.

Can a useful taxonomy be developed and applied that begins to look at levels of comprehension in students' written responses?

The taxonomy that I developed is a descriptive, hierarchical in nature measurement that addresses the various levels in students' written responses. The levels are explicit in their descriptions and provide a "stepping stone" from level to level. For instance, Kara writes,

> I think that it is impossible to have little wrenches and things small enough for rats. In a human store, they couldn't buy them. They didn't have money. Or the salesman would be wide-eyed to have a rat eyeing their merchandise. They would probably steal it, but how? The Toy Tinker chapter on page 167 quotes, "And the beauty was, since they were designed for working on toys, they were small enough for us to handle." I liked that quote and the way that Robert C. O'Brien put it.

Kara is taking a step back from the book and looking at this situation from the outside world. She made text-to-life connections and justified why the rats could not buy the tools in a human store. She provided a quote from the text to praise the author's use of language, she did not however, explain why she liked the quote. This response was marked on the level of connection. This enabled me to give credit to the type of connections that she did make in her response, but the higher level descriptions would demonstrate the more complex responses that could have been made. The levels are distinct in their own way, but they allow room and provide flexibility to move to the next level.

The taxonomy appeared to evaluate students' responses thoroughly and with respect to the different responses given. It was able to analyze the responses but give credit to the individuality of the responses as well.

What techniques or support can be used to enhance students' discussion?

I found that a variety of techniques could enhance students' discussions. Post–it notes and mini-lessons were essential in illustrating the importance of including support from the text and evaluating the author's craft. The post-it notes enabled me to ask questions to further develop the students' responses and prompt them to think beyond the book. The mini-lessons offered a framework for the students to understand the expectations of the discussions and their writing. The pre-surveys provided information on the prior experience of the students in literature circles and what books they wanted to read. The anecdotal records served as not only an assessment tool, but also a self-checking device for students if the teacher could not assess all the students. The taxonomy was an assessment tool for me to see the growth in students' written responses. I was able to use the taxonomy to aid the students' responses and see where they needed improvement. The video and audio tapes served as a self-reflecting device for students to actually see and hear themselves and check for possible changes in their literature circle behavior. The students were able to monitor their behavior and see where changes in attitude or participation were needed.

These questions framed an interesting study. I am excited to see the degree to which the students made connections to the world in which they reside. The students' written responses not only astounded me, but illustrated how effective literature discussion circles can be in the classroom. This study supports the literature discussion

circle concept and how important the implementation of discussion is to students' comprehension.

Outcomes of the study and Its Relation to Theory and Literature

The goal of literature circles is to let prior experiences develop and expand meaning making for the students involved. Literature circles can develop a higher level of understanding that may not be frequented by most basal and lecture type instruction. Loban (1963) emphasizes the importance of students' communication; he states "elementary pupils need many opportunities to grapple with their own thought in situations where they have someone to whom they wish to communicate successfully" (p.88). The importance of giving the world meaning through the eyes of another character or author can be reached even more extensively with a discussion amongst other readers. Ideas can come to life and understanding of different perspectives can only be discussed, not taught. As Sebesta et al. (1995) states, "Literature circles should not only increase comprehension, but also lead to deeper reading" (p.95).

Future Studies

Another aspect to consider is the effect of the students' responses in the discussion and the influence they might have over their peers' responses. For instance, if one student felt one way about a character's motive and another student felt a different way, then would the more influential student change the mind of a particular student, thus affecting his/her written response? A student might have come to the conversation with one idea in mind and leave with another, possibly changing the originality of that opinion. These are also valuable topics to explore.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Parent Permission Form

Dear Families

Some of you may know that I am working this year on obtaining my Master's in Education degree with a Concentration in Literacy from Western Washington University. My project will examine discussion in literature circles with fourth and fifth grade students. The final paper will reflect the quality of discussion groups. All confidential information will be protected. Names and places will be changed; no child will be identified by name.

A fellow colleague of mine, Joy Wiggins, will be working in our classroom for three months on a similar literature circle project from September through November, 1999. She will be working with approximately six students and focusing on their written responses to literature.

In our studies, students will learn how to evaluate literature while taking turns and learning to listen to others in a supportive atmosphere. This project will be directly related to the teaching that I always do in my classroom. I am continuously researching best practices for the classroom and implementing them into my reading instruction. In no way will this project be disruptive.

Findings will be presented to Western Washington University faculty, and there is a possibility that this information may be published for educational purposes. However, it will not identify (school) or your child. Some of the information that I collect will be in the form of audio or videotapes for my use only. Findings will be used solely for educational purposes.

Even though all information will be kept confidential, we need your permission to include your child in these projects. Please feel free to contact Joy or me with further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Carol Alwood (#)
Joy Wiggins (#)
Please return the bottom portion of this letter to school with your child.

____ I will allow my child, _____ to participate in these Western Washington University graduate study projects.

____ I will not allow my child, _____ to participate in these Western Washington University graduate study projects.

_____
Signature Date

Parent letter for Permission to use Students' Written Responses

Dear Families: *2-8-00*

As you know, Miss. Wiggins and I are researching the effects of literature circles in the language arts curriculum. As an important component to our research questions, the written responses are an integral aspect of our final papers. We would like to photocopy some of the written responses provided by the students in their reading logs to illustrate some valuable points in our papers. All confidential information will be protected. Names and places will be changed; no child will be identified by name. We will need your permission to copy this information. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

We are currently enjoying our second round of literature circles. Ask your child about how it is going. There is a lot of learning going on!

Thank you,

Carol Alwood extension 4920
Joy Wiggins home: 647-1371 or Western Washington University 650-3336 x 5433
Please return the bottom portion of this letter with your child.

___ I will allow my child's written responses from their reading log to be copied for Joy Wiggin's and Carol Alwood's graduate study project.

___ I will not allow my child's written responses from their reading log to be copied for Joy Wiggin's and Carol Alwood's graduate study project.

Child's Name: _____ Signature: _____
Date:_____

Appendix B
Student Pre-Survey

Name:_____

Date:_____

1 **Have you ever participated in a literature circle discussion with just your classmates? Yes____ No____**

2 **Do you like to read at home? If so, what kind of books do you like to read?**

_____

_____

3 **Do you discuss books with friends or family? If so, who and what kind of books?**

_____

_____

4 **What books would you like to read this year?**

_____

_____

5 **Please list any suggestions you might have that would help you read better and more often.**

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C
(Sample)

Lesson/Topic: Literature Discussion Circles Grade 4/5

1. The students will be given a pre survey to assess their attitudes toward reading and literature circles. They will be given a post survey at the end to see what they would or would not change about the literature circles in this classroom.
2. The teacher will present a variety of books from a fantasy genre for the students to choose. The students will write their top three choices of the books they would like to read and hand it in to the teacher.
3. The teacher will organize the students into groups according to their top three choices. Some students might not get their top choice.
4. The students will decide how many chapters they will read from the book.
5. They will be given time during class to read and gather ideas for discussion for their peer discussion group. They will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays of every week for the literature circles for 15-20 minutes.
6. There will be six students in each group. I will evaluate all six students.
7. For the first four sessions, the students will write in their response logs and then have an open discussion. For the last four sessions, the students will discuss the chapters and then write in their response logs.
8. They are to bring their book and any ideas or comments they would like to make about the book to every session.
9. I will be listening in on the group and writing comments in my anecdotal records according to the codes I have designed as well as video and audio taping each session.

10. The students will respond in their reading logs according to line of open-ended questioning developed by Sloan (1984) and Vandergrift (1990) and "Focus on your Feelings," (See Appendix D).
11. These written responses will be assessed through a collection of taxonomies developed by Bloom et al. (1956), Vandergrift (1990), Sebesta et al. (1995) and Smith & Barrett (1970) that I have integrated into a useful tool for this particular research question. The responses will be evaluated and analyzed to study the effects of peer discussion on the level of comprehension achieved.

Learning Targets

To examine how children utilize literature circles to better comprehend the text, and articulate their writing about the text by listening and discussing it with their peers.

Objectives

This portion was taken from the Washington Essential Academic Learning Requirements for Grade 4 (Washington State Commission on Student Learning, 1998).

Essential Learning Requirements for Writing

1.2 - The student uses style appropriate to the audience and purpose

-Use voice, word choice, and sentence fluency for intended style and audience (p. 27).

-Communicates own perspective and ideas (p.29)

2.2 - The student writes for different purposes including:

-To respond to teacher's prompt

-To tell about something

-To name something

-To describe something

-To imagine

-To learn (p. 31)

3.3 – The student understands and uses the steps of the writing process (p.28)

-Students will learn to revise the writing process (p.28)

-Collect input form others (p. 32)

4 - The student analyzes and evaluates the effectiveness of written work (p.28)

4.1- To assess own strengths and needs for improvement (p. 34)

4.2- Seek and offer feedback (p.34)

Essential Learning Requirements for Communication

1. - The student uses listening and observation skills to gain understanding (p.39).

1.2- Listen and observe to gain and interpret understanding (p. 39).

1.3- Check for understanding by asking questions and paraphrasing (p.39)

-ask questions to clarify content and meaning including who, what, when , where and how (p.41).

2.1 Communicate clearly to a range of audiences for different purposes

- Communicate to teacher, small group, and class (p.42).

3.- The student uses communication strategies and skills to work

effectively with others (p.40).

Possible Reading and Writing Strategies

Students will be learning various reading and writing strategies while reading their books. Mini-lessons will be provided on some of the different strategies that they may need to work with while reading.

Reading Strategies and Author's Craft

- Supporting an opinion with details from the text
- Summarizing
- Distinguishing between fact and fiction
- Determining author's point of view
- Inferring a character's motives, feelings or traits
- Creation of mood
- Literary devices
- Different types of openings and leads

Adapted from Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (1998)

Reader's and Writer's Workshop

Name:_____ Date:_____

Directions: Check the box when you have finished each job and describe your progress made on the lines below.

Read for at least 20 minutes every day (what book title?)

- ☐ M _____
- ☐ T _____
- ☐ W _____
- ☐ Th _____
- ☐ F _____

Write in your draft book for at least 20 minutes every day (what piece are you working on and what stage of the writing process are you in?)

- ☐ M _____
- ☐ T _____
- ☐ W _____
- ☐ Th _____
- ☐ F _____

Practice your list of spelling words at least twice a week (attach practice pages).

M ☐ T ☐ W ☐ Th ☐ F ☐

My words this week →

Write in your response log at least twice a week.

T Th

☐ ☐

Project work:

☐ M _____

☐ T _____

☐ W _____

☐ Th _____

☐ F _____

My reading goal for the week is:_____

_____

My writing goal for the week is:_____

_____

Comments about work during reading and writing workshop this week:_____

_____

Student Signature:_____

Parent Signature:_____

Appendix D
Sloan (1984) and Vandergrift (1990)
Open-ended questions for Oral and Written Response
(will vary on order of questioning)

1 What incident, problem, conflict, or situation does the author use to get the story started?

2 What does the author do to create suspense, to make you want to read on to find out what happens?

3 Does the story as a whole create a certain mood or feeling? What is the mood? How is it created?

4 What idea or ideas does this story make you think about? How does the author get you to think about this?

5 Do any particular feelings come across in this story? Does the story actually make you feel in a certain way or does it make you think about what it is like to feel that way?

6 Were there any clues that the author built into the story that helped you to anticipate the outcome? Did you think these clues were important when you read them?

7 Did you have strong feelings as you read the story? What did the author do to make you feel strongly?

8 Are any characters changed during the story? If they are, how are they different? What changed them? Did it seem believable?

9 Your own " Focus on your Feelings" question. (see Appendix I)

Adapted from Sloan (1984) and Vandergrift (1990)

"Focus on your Feelings"

sample prompts to consider in the response logs

I wish…
I thought…
I felt…
I remembered…
I did not understand…
I liked…
I wasn't sure…
I didn't like…
I predict…
I think…
I understood…
I enjoyed…
I disliked…
I agree…
I disagree…
I prefer…
I would change…
I predicted…
I laughed…

Adapted from Hill, Johnson & Noe. (1995)

Appendix E
Response Log Layout
Located at the front of Student's Response Logs

Response Log Layout

You need:

1. **Today's Date**
2. **Title of the book you are writing about**
3. **Author**
4. **Chapter that you are discussing**

Then you need to include:

5. **Summarize the main events of the chapter**
6. **Respond to the questions at the front of your journal**

Appendix F
Teacher's Anecdotal Records

Name of Student:_____ Date:_____

Book Title:_____

Record student responses that indicated any of the following:

Date:					
Shows enjoyment					
Shares reaction					
Seeks meaning from illustrations					
Draws conclusions					
Elaborates					
Justifies					
Explains					
Expresses feelings					
Relates to personal experience					
Goes beyond "I like"					
Makes predictions					
Asks Questions					
Discussing literary elements					
Discusses Author's Craft					
Provide support from text					

Additional Comments:

Adapted from Literature circles and response. (Hill, Johnson, Noe, 1995)

Appendix G
Adaptation of Taxonomies developed by Joy Wiggins

Taxonomy:

Level 1. Knowledge Base/ Inference-Readers recall or retell the events of the story (Smith & Barrett, 1979, p.63). They may build on previously learned material, such as main idea, defining words, or providing the "who", "what", "why", "when", "where" descriptions (Vandergrift, 1990).

Level 2. Personal- Readers' responses are subjective and personal. "Responses include, personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, morals or beliefs", (Vandergrift, 1990).

Level 3. Comprehension-Readers grasp the overall meaning of the text including knowledge base and personal responses. They are able to identify the key components in the text including the theme, genre, literary or historical context, setting, plot, point of view, language and characters. Readers also seek meaning from the illustrations. They make predictions as to what will emerge in the text (Bloom et al., 1956; Hancock, 2000 & Vandergrift, 1990)

Level 4. Connection -Readers interpret meaning and are able to generalize it to broader phenomena. They apply their own life experiences to text and compare it to different pieces of work and other texts. They make a character assessment "Responses indicate the reader's judgement of the actions or values of the character measure against his/her own personal values or standards of behavior" (Hancock, 2000, p. 337). For example: I wonder… they are able to dig deeper into the text and plot by trying to figure out the characters' actions. They make text to text and text to life connections and they may compare the current text to other texts or movies that they have seen (Hancock, 2000).

Level 5. Interpretation-They are able to use the learned materials from the text in a new or concrete situation to which they will apply their new- found knowledge (Bloom et al., 1956). They are able to reexamine their own views, think about other points of view and hypothesize, generalize and empathize from their world to the outside world. They also may make predictions as to what will emerge from the text (Hancock, 2000; Sebesta et al., 1995).

Level 6. Analysis- Readers analyze the relevance the text has to the genre, time, period, characters and author. Readers provide support from the text emphasizing a justification for their opinions, theories or predictions (Bloom et al., 1956; Vandergrift, 1990).

Level 7. Evaluation-Readers judge the merits of a piece of work on a "personal, literary, social or moral criteria" (Vandergrift, 1990, p.40). Reader's are able to evaluate genre, author's craft, provide support and justify their opinions.

Level 8. Appreciation- Reader's awareness of literary technique, forms, styles and structures that make the readers respond emotionally as well as in a appreciative manner. Reader's understand and appreciate the aesthetic qualities of the stimulating plots, themes, settings, incidents, language and characters. Readers are able to respond emotionally, identify with the characters or situations, react to the author's style and use of language and the imagery of "painting words with pictures" (Smith & Barrett, 1979).

Adapted from Bloom et al. (1956), Hancock (2000), Sebesta et al. (1995)
Smith & Barrett (1979) and Vandergrift (1995).

Appendix H
Evaluation Form for Written Responses

Name:_____

Date:				
Title:				
I. Knowledge Base/ Inference				
II. Personal				
III. Compre-hension				
IV. Connection				
V. Interpretation				
VI. Analysis				
VII. Evaluation				
VIII. Appreciation				
Effort (- or +)				
Efferent or Aesthetic (A/E)				

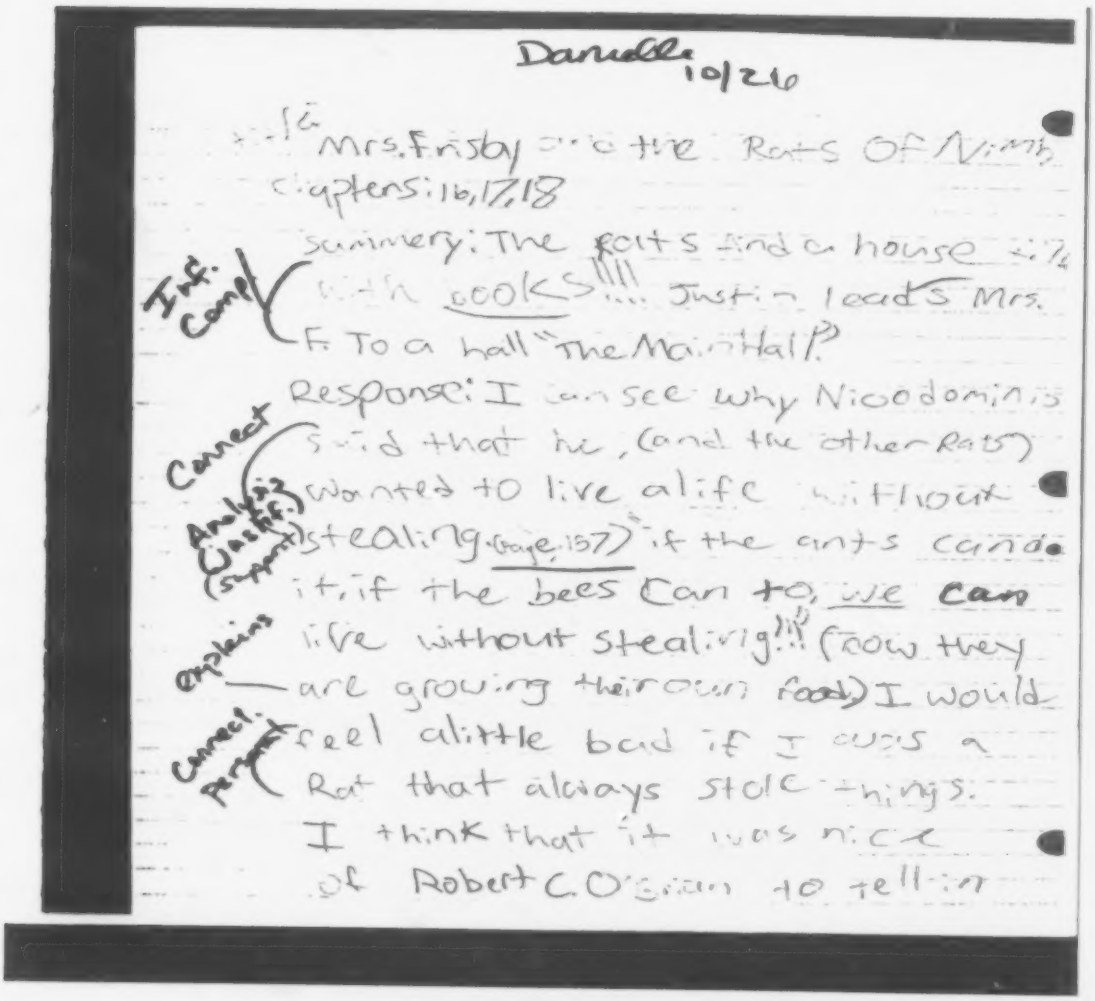
Comments:

Adapted from Bloom et al. (1956), Sebesta et al. (1995) Smith & Barrett (1979), and Vandergrift (1995.

Appendix I
Sample of Students' Written Responses

Dana, Third session of the "after" sequence

Title: Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh
Chapters: 16, 17, 18
Summary: The Rats find a house filled with books!!!! Justin leads Mrs. F. to a hall "The Main Hall".
Response: I can see why Nicodemus said that he, (and the other rats) wanted to live a life without stealing. (page 157) "if the ants can do it, if the bees can to, we can live without stealing!!!" (now they are growing their own food.) I would feel a little bad if I was a Rat that always stole things. I think that it was nice of Robert C. O'Brien to tell in his book that Rats have feelings too, because some people might not respect Rats, so they can see (even thought this is fiction) that they can have hurt feelings, and mean and nice and sad feelings. That is kind and considerate to the Rats. (everybody has feelings!)


Danielle 10/26

Title: Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh
Chapters: 16, 17, 18

Summery: The rats find a house filled with books!!!! Justin leads Mrs. F. To a hall "The Main Hall"

Response: I can see why Nicodomis said that he, (and the other Rats) wanted to live a life without stealing. (page 157) "if the ants can do it, if the bees can to, we can live without stealing!!!" (now they are growing their own food) I would feel a little bad if I was a Rat that always stole things. I think that it was nice of Robert C. O'Brien to tell in

Inf. Comp
Connect
Analysis (Use of Inf.) (support)
explains
Connect Perspect

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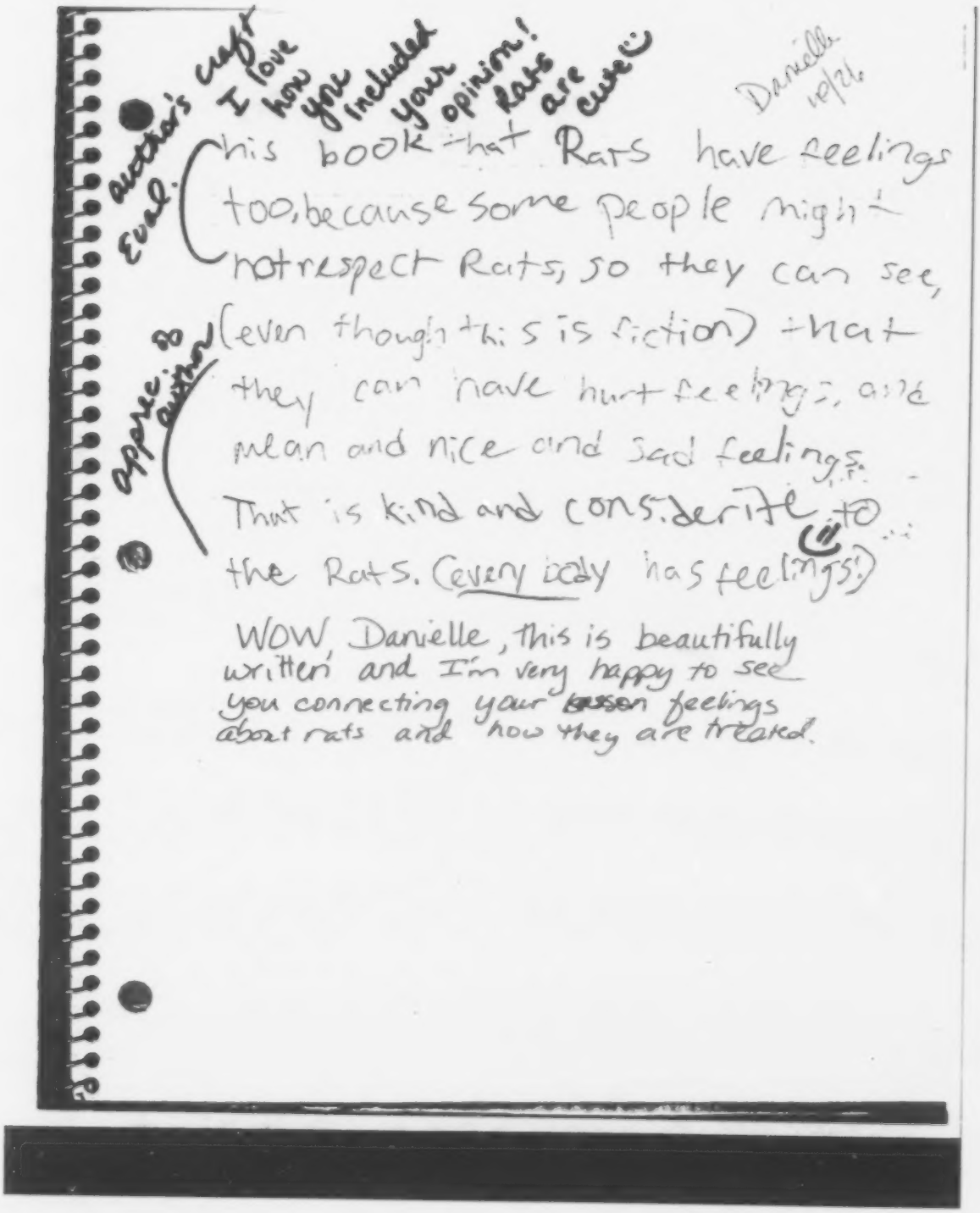
Dana (continued)


author's craft
I love how you included your opinion! Rats are cute☺
Danielle 10/21
Excl.
this book that Rats have feelings too, because some people might not respect Rats, so they can see, (even though this is fiction) that they can have hurt feelings, and mean and nice and sad feelings. That is kind and considerate to the Rats. (every body has feelings!)
appreciates author
WOW Danielle, this is beautifully written and I'm very happy to see you connecting your lesson feelings about rats and how they are treated.

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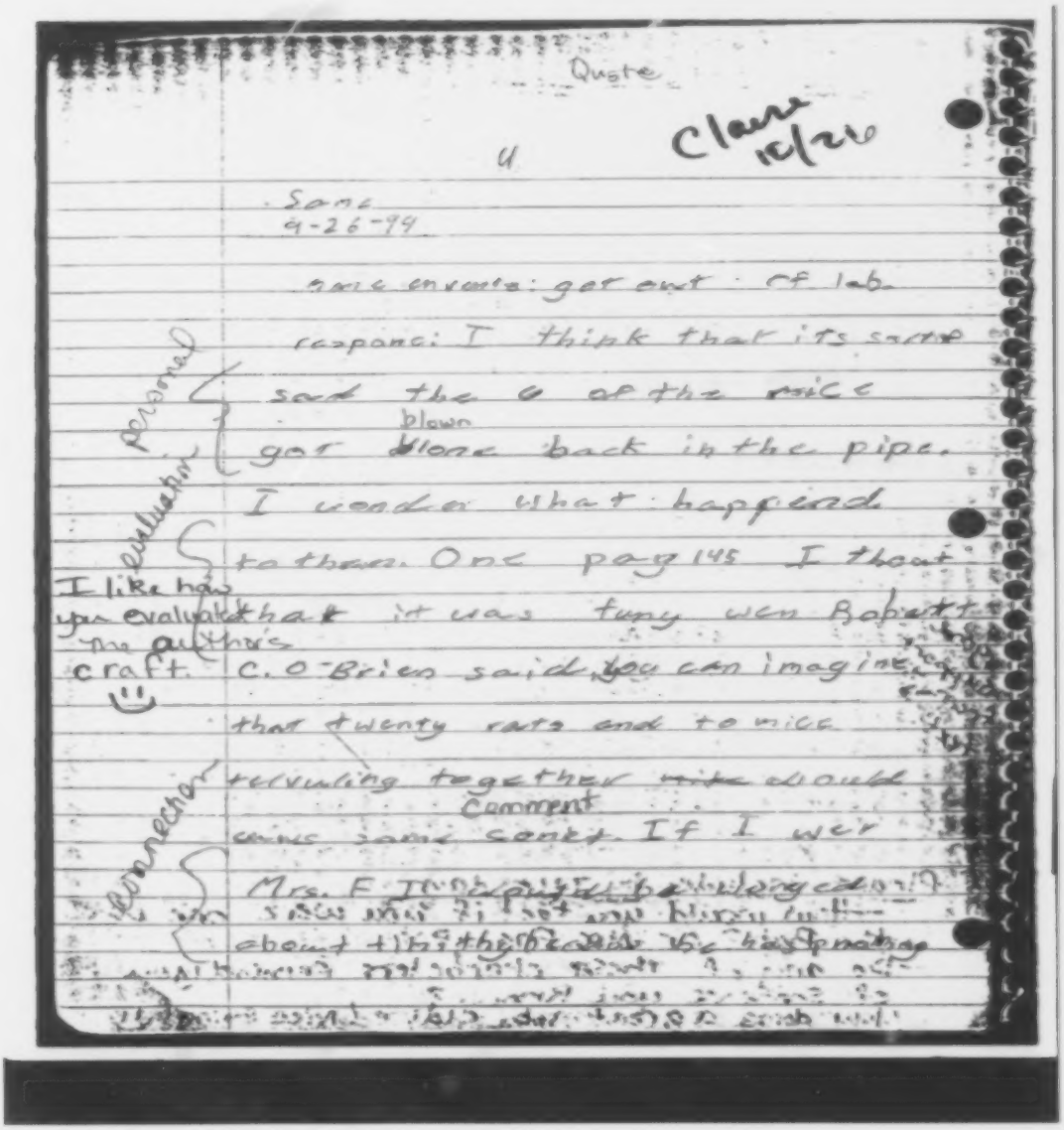
Cecelia
Third Session of the "after" sequence

9-26-99 (wrong date)

Main Events: got out of lab.

Response: I think that it's sort of sad the six of the mice got blown back in the pipe. I wonder what happened to them. On page 145, I thought that it was funny when Robert C. O'Brien said, "you can imagine that twenty rats and two mice traveling together would cause some comment". If I were Mrs. Frisby, I would be worried about Timothy because he has pneumonia.



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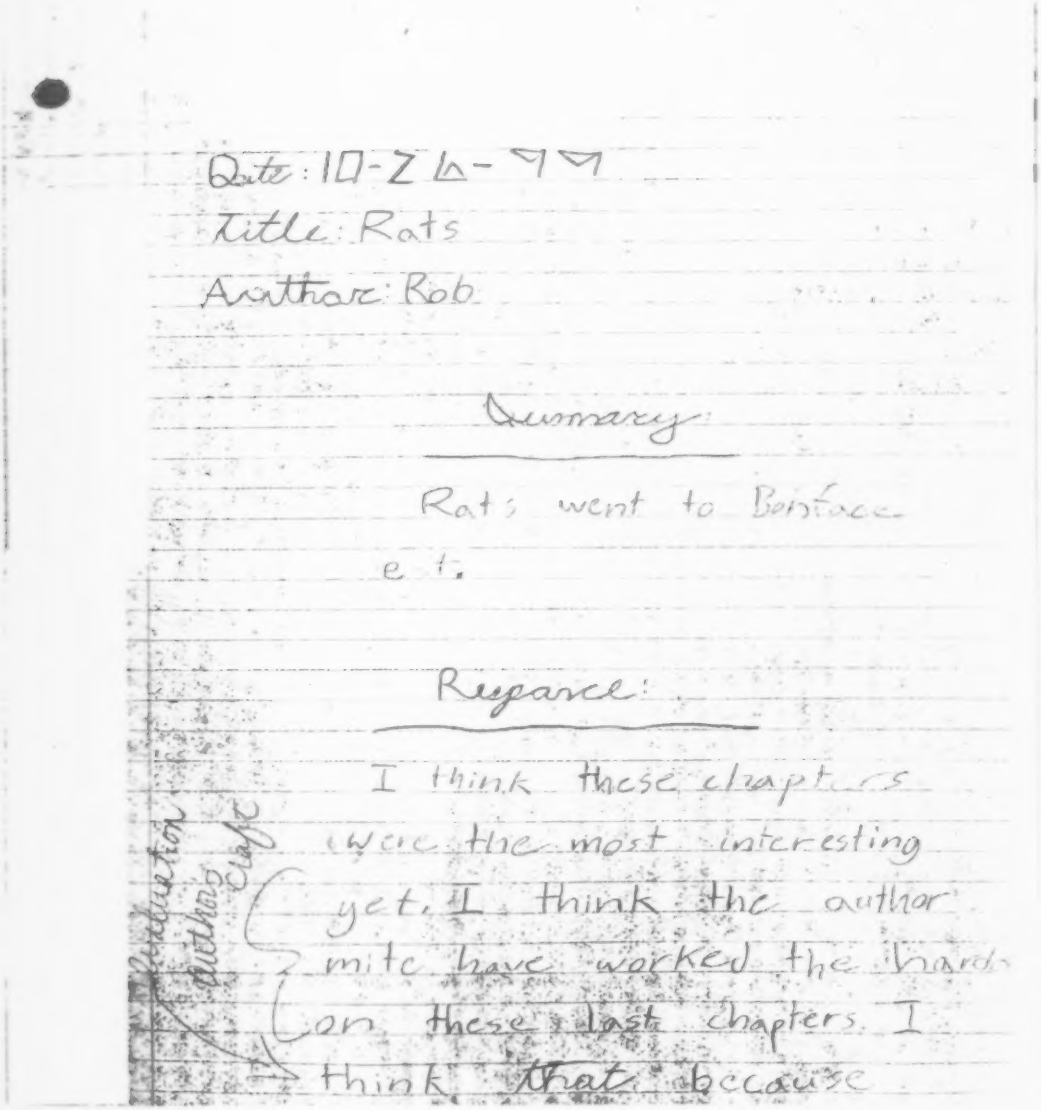
Don

Third session of the "after" sequence

10-26-99
Title: Rats
Author: Rob
Summary: Rats went to the Boniface Estate
Response: I think these chapters were the most interesting yet. I think the author might have worked the hardest on these last chapters. I think that because of all the little details, and the way he described them. Like on page 140, he said "blown backwards into a dark maze of tunnels", instead of just plain old blown backwards.


Date: 10-26-99
Title: Rats
Author: Rob
Summary:
Rats went to Boniface
e t.
Regarce:
I think these chapters
were the most interesting
yet. I think the author
mite have worked the hards
on these last chapters. I
think that because
Introduction
Author's Craft

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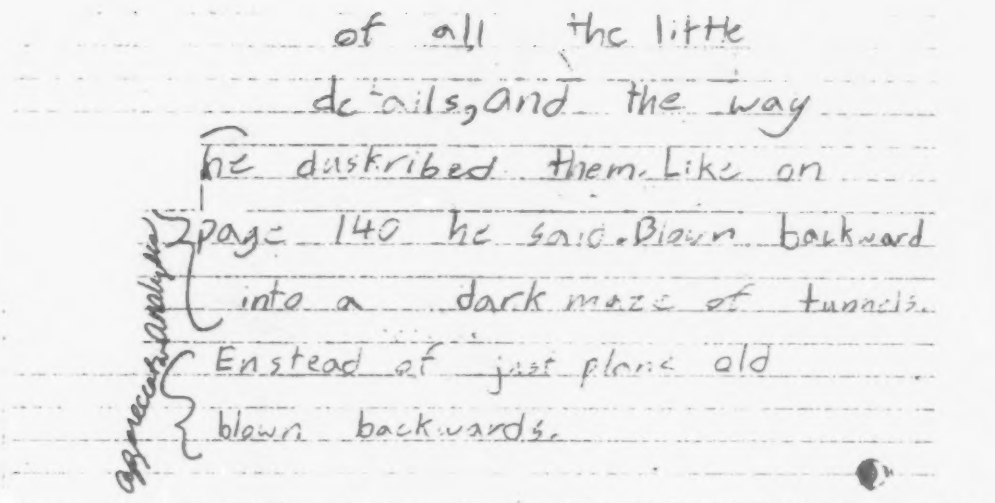
Don (continued)


of all the little
details, and the way
he duskribed them. Like on
page 140 he said. Blown backward
into a dark maze of tunnels.
Enstead of just plain old
blown backwards.
appreciates analysis

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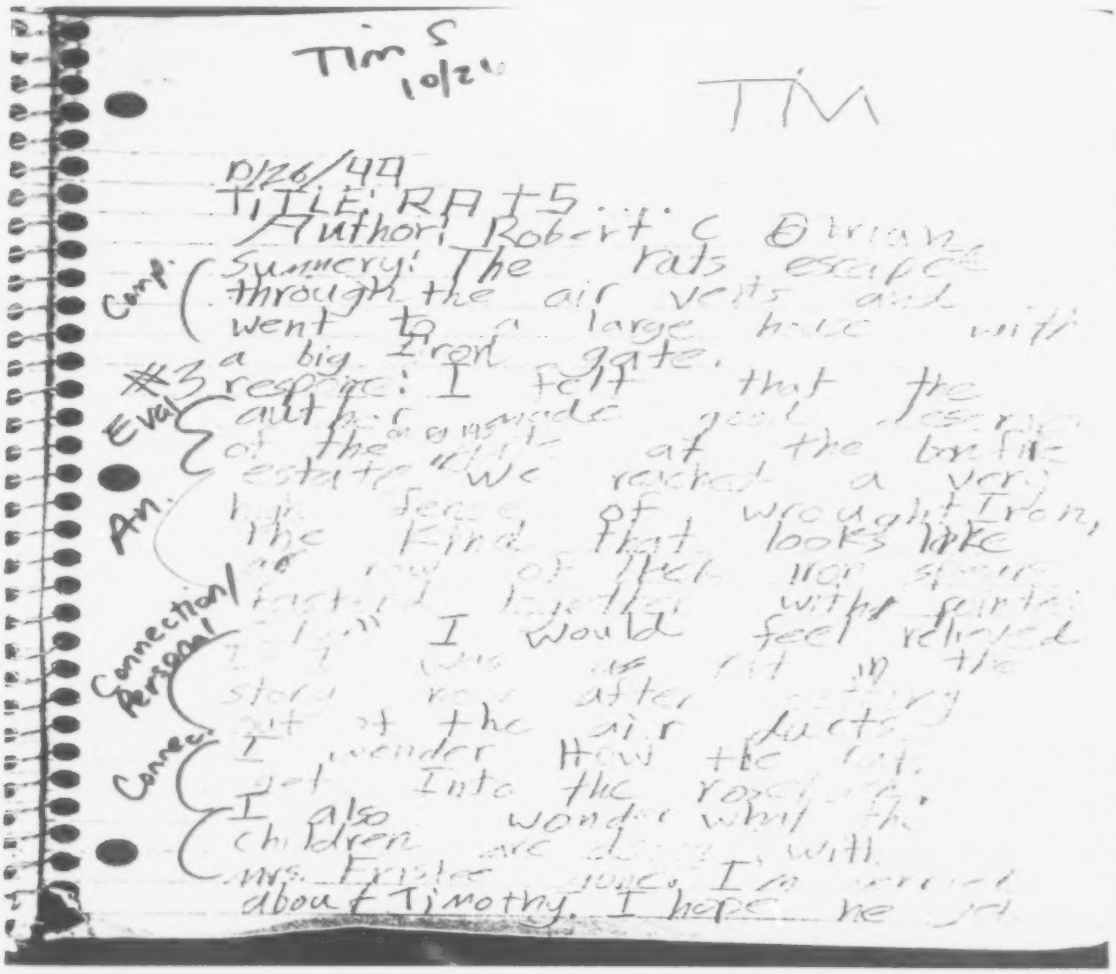
Tom
Third Session of the "after" sequence

10/26/99
Title: Rats…
Author: Robert C. O'Brian
Summery: The rats escape through the air vents and went to a large house with a big Iron gate.
3 Response: I felt that the author made good description of the gate at the bonfire estate "we reached a very high fence of wrought Iron, the kind that looks like a row of iron spears fastened together with pointed tops." I would feel relieved If I was a rat in the story now after getting out of the air ducts. I wonder How the rats get into the rosebush. I also wonder what the children are doing, with Mrs. Frisbee gone. I'm worried about Timothy. I hope he gets better. The book is doing pretty good, but it could be better.



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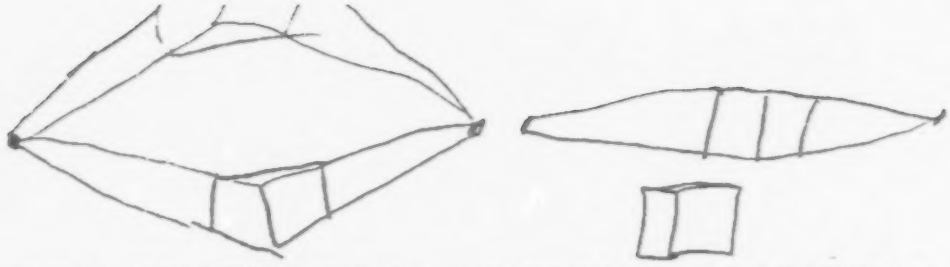
Tom (continued)



better. The book is doing pretty good but It could te tetter.

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Kara

Third session of the "after" sequence

Date: Oct. 26th 1999
Title: Mrs. Frisby ....
Pgs. Read: 3 chapters
Summary: Mrs. Frisby listens to the story and they escape in the air ducts.
Response: I think they are very smart to know how to escape. How do they know that they are called "air ducts"? I also think that it is ver interesting when some rat finds the label on the cage. One says that she has been trying to read it for days. Then she reads it and opens the cage! My question: I wonder if Mrs. Frisby will ever go back?

Date: Oct 26th 1999
Title. Mrs. Frisby. . . . .
Pgs Read: 3 chapters
Summary:
Mrs. Frisby listens to the story and they escape. in the Air Ducts.

Response:
I think that they are very smart cats to know how to escape. How do they know that they are called "Air Ducts?" I Also think it is very interesting when some rat finds the label on the cage. She says she has been trying to read it for days. Then, she reads it and opens the cage!

My question:
I wonder if Mrs. Frisby will ever go Back?

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